THE WHITE BLACKBIRD

HUDSON DOUGLAS

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THE WHITE BLACKBIRD

"Feel my pulse now, before you go," the pseudo-doctor's patient commanded.

THE WHITE BLACKBIRD

BY
HUDSON DOUGLAS
AUTHOR OF "A MILLION A MINUTE,"
"THE LANTERN OF LUCK," ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS IN COLOUR BY
HERMAN PFEIFER

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FOR

ISOBEL MY WIFE

AND

OUR DAUGHTER ISOBEL

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The White Blackbird

CHAPTER I

A TROPICAL DISCUSSION

"I'D far rather beg in the gutter than marry you, Jasper!" flashed the girl, at last goaded past all patience. Her clouded, indignant eyes expressed both contempt and aversion for the young man leaning over the deck-rail beside her.

He was still a young man as years go and in spite of the grey streaks in his dark hair, the crow's-feet above his cheek-bones; more than passably good-looking, too, with his regular profile and straight, spare, athletic figure, though his sleepy eyes were a trifle close-set and more than a trifle untrustworthy, though the black moustache he was twirling with a long, thin, almost womanish hand hid a cruel, selfish mouth.

In his smart white yachting-suit and panama, lounging over the sun-dried teak taffrail with his knees crossed, he seemed to be neither oppressed by the tropical heat nor impressed at all by anything that his companion could say.

"I'd *far* rather beg in the gutter," she repeated, as if to settle the matter. And the emphasis with which she spoke showed that she meant what she said.

"But — that doesn't make any difference, my dear

Sallie," he once more answered, displaying his white, even teeth in a slight, amused smile. "You're going to marry me just the same. And you may as well make up your mind right away — that it will pay you best to be pleasant about it.

"Captain Dove has come to the point at last," he went on to explain condescendingly, in the same cool, careless, conversational tone, a tone which, however, could not quite hide the ugly determination behind it. "You've upset him for good and all this time. He's aching to get rid of you now. In fact, he's cursing himself that he didn't — when he might have made more out of the deal. And, anyhow, he's promised you to me."

The girl's slim, shapely body had suddenly stiffened. She started up and away from him with a gesture of blind repulsion. Her pure, proud, sensitive face showed the struggle that was going on in her mind — between fear and hope; quick fear that what he had just said might be true, slow hope that he had been lying to her again.

He had turned on one elbow with a lazy air of inexhaustible tolerance, that he might the more conveniently follow her with his greedy glance. He was apparently quite sure of himself — and her. At any rate, he was openly gloating over her beauty in her distress while she stood gazing in dire dismay about the shabby, unkempt little steamer which was all the home she had in the world, all the home she had ever had except for a few forgotten years of her childhood.

Its name, on a life-buoy triced to the rusty netting between the rails, was the *Olive Branch*, but its port of registry had been painted out. It rode deep although it was decked after the old-fashioned switchback design and had

no cargo on board. Its squat, inconspicuous smokestack helped to give it a somewhat nefarious air.

About its ill-kept, untidy decks there were very few signs of life and none at all of luxury. Under a tattered canvas sun-screen on the fo'c'sle-head a ragged deck hand was on the look-out, his scorched face expressive of anything but contentment with his circumstances. He shifted frequently from one bare, blistered foot to the other; it was impossible to stand still for long, with the deck-plates as hot as any frying-pan on a brisk fire.

On the bridge, the officer of the watch was pacing to and fro. Every time he turned on his beat beneath the dirty, weather-worn awning he paused to dart a suspicious, expectant glance at the double hatchway which led to the crew's quarters, forward. The open wheel-house behind him was occupied only by the quartermaster on duty. The remainder of the watch on deck were nowhere visible.

Through the heat-haze to starboard the blurred outline of the low-lying African coast was dimly discernible. Seaward, ahead, and astern, the long, oily swell that the North-east Trades never reach blazed like molten metal under the almost vertical afternoon sun. Except for the lonely little grey steamer wallowing sluggishly northward through it, the world of water was empty to the horizon.

A poignant sense of her own no less forlorn plight there stirred the girl to glance round at her companion, as if in helpless appeal.

"You don't really mean — what you said, do you, Jasper?" she asked, with a very pitiful inflection in her low, musical voice.

"Every word," he answered her promptly. "If

you don't believe me, go down and ask Captain Dove."

She turned away from him again, to hide the effect of his curt reply. But her drooping shoulders no doubt betrayed that to him. He pulled out a cigar-case and, having lighted a rank cheroot with languid deliberation, puffed that contemplatively.

"I *will* go down and ask Captain Dove," she said to herself at length, with tremulous courage, and was moving toward the companion-hatch when she heard from the other end of the ship a sudden ominous discord, a sound such as might have come from a nest of hornets about to swarm. There seemed to be something wrong forward; and she faced about again, instantly.

Peering through the hurtful sunshine with anxious eyes, her scarlet lips compressed and resolute, she saw that the look-out had turned on his half-baked feet to stare from the fo'c'sle into the well-deck behind him. The officer of the watch had ceased his regular march and countermarch, and was also gazing downward in that direction. Even her self-confident companion had started up from his idle posture, in obvious alarm.

A figure darted up one of the two ladders which led to the bridge. The officer of the watch had left his post by the other at the same moment, as if to avoid the newcomer, and was making his way aft, unhurriedly, yet at speed. He did not look back, but she was aware of other figures which also had appeared in a moment from nowhere, and were following him on tiptoe, under cover where it could be had. Once, a flash, as of flame, amidships, almost forced from her lips a wild cry of warning, but that was only a glint of sun on a gun-barrel where the browning had worn

away and left the steel bright. And he, seemingly unaware of the danger behind him, reached the poop unharmed, a big, fair, bluff-looking, broad-shouldered man in shabby blue sea-uniform.

At the foot of the narrow stairway by which alone access could be had to the poop, he called softly up to the girl at the rail above, "They'll be at our throats in a minute, Sallie. Get you away below, quick — and warn the Old Man."

At the top of the steps he stopped, and turned, and stayed there, blocking the stairway with his great body. And the armed ruffians swarming aft in his wake slackened their pace, then hung back about the hatch on the deck below. But each had a finger crooked on the trigger of a ready rifle. The simplest word or motion misplaced at that first moment of crisis must have precipitated the murder that was to be.

The girl had obeyed him promptly, if without appearance of haste and, once out of sight of the mutineers, there was no need to study her steps. She darted across the dim, daintily appointed saloon below and, having knocked imperatively at one of the two doors on that side of the ship entered, without waiting for any permission, the stateroom it opened into.

"The men have broken out, Captain Dove," she cried, breathless a little, her bosom heaving. "They're coming aft — there isn't a moment to spare. What are we to do?"

In the berth behind the curtains some one was moving. The room was practically in darkness, since the open port was also screened, to shut out the searching sun. But, in spite of all such precautions, the heat was almost unbearable.

The curtains parted slightly and from their opening a

face peered out at her, the blandly benevolent face of a mild-looking, white-haired old man who, at a casual glance, might perhaps have passed for a clergyman or a missionary.

But in an instant a most disconcerting change came over his features. Some dormant devil seemed to have wakened within him and was glaring out at the girl from behind evil, red-rimmed eyes. His appearance then might have frightened a man away. But she stood her ground undismayed.

No less suddenly he broke into a torrent of fierce abuse, freely interspersed with blood-curdling, old-fashioned oaths. And that was only stemmed by a frantic paroxysm of coughing which left a crimson froth about the white stubble upon his chin. He fell back into the gloom behind the curtains, as if he would choke.

The girl hurriedly filled a glass with water from a carafe on a rack at one side of the room, pulled the curtains apart, and held it to the sick man's lips. He sipped at it and then struck it away so that most of its contents spilled on her skirts.

"Would you poison me now, you witch!" he gasped, and then, regaining his voice a little, "Ambrizette," he called weakly, with a quavering imprecation, "brandy. Bring me the bottle. Your mistress has poisoned me."

A coloured woman, stunted, misshapen, almost inconceivably ugly, came shambling in with a bottle, which he snatched eagerly from her and set to his lips, while she made off again, in very evident dread of him. The colour came back to his face, and at last he laid it aside, with a sigh of relief.

"The men have broken out, have they?" he muttered, half to himself. "And you come to *me* to ask what's to be done!" He glowered down at one of his arms which

lay across his chest in a sling and tightly bandaged. His voice once more became venomous. "It's your fault that I'm lying here," he snarled. "You and your bully Yoxall have taken charge of my ship between you. Why don't the two of you tackle them? What the Seven Stars d'ye think I care now whether you sink or swim!"

She turned away from him with a little, tired, hopeless gesture.

"I don't care very much, either, now," she answered, dully, "what happens to me. But — it's you they're after, Captain Dove, and there isn't a moment to spare. They've got the guns up already."

The old man was plucking with feverish fingers at the fine lace counterpane which covered him. He made an effort to rise, but lay back again with a groan.

"They've got the guns up, have they!" he growled, deep down in his throat, with a most horrid effect. "Then one of the mates at least must be standing in with them — the mutinous dogs! And since it's come to settling old scores, I'm ready; I'll settle all with them before we go any farther." His eyes were sunken with sickness and he was so weak that he could scarcely move, but his spirit seemed to be altogether unquenchable.

"I'm going to settle with them now," he declared, "and — don't you interfere again, Sallie. I've stood all I'm going to stand from you, too. You've got to fancy yourself far too much, my girl! Listen here! Next time I have to talk to you, it'll be with that," — he pointed to a heavy *kourbash* of hippopotamus-hide hanging from a hook on the panelling, — "and, by all that's holy! if I've to begin, I'll lace you from head to heel with it — as I should have done long ago."

The girl shrank as if he had actually struck her with it. She knew he was even capable of carrying out that threat.

"Where's Jasper Slyne?" he demanded, in a low whisper, almost exhausted.

"On deck, above, with Reuben Yoxall," she told him.

"Send him down here to me. I must get up out o' this. To-day's Sunday, isn't it? What was our position at noon?"

She told him exactly, at once, and he seemed content to rely on her nautical knowledge. He nodded, as if satisfied.

"*That's* all right. Off you go now. And don't forget what I've said to you. Tell Slyne to look sharp — and stand the men off somehow till I get on deck," he snapped, as she hurried away.

She did not know what might have happened overhead while she had been below, and heaved a heartfelt sigh of relief as, gaining the open air again, she saw that the two men she had left there were still at the rail, unharmed. Only one of them looked round as she approached, and it was to him she spoke.

"Captain Dove wants you in a hurry, Jasper," she said, and he went below in his turn, not altogether unwillingly.

As he disappeared behind her, she glanced down at the main-deck alive with armed men, as evil-looking a crowd as could be recruited from the purlieus of Hell's Kitchen or crimped from the Hole-in-the-Wall. The flush on her face died away.

"What are they waiting for, Rube?" she whispered to the big man at the top of the steps, whose steady glance seemed to have such a repressive effect on them.

"Sunset, I suppose," he answered in a low tone. "If

no one crosses them, they'll maybe wait till it's dark before they begin. Better go below again, Sallie."

She shook her head and said "No," aloud, since he was not looking at her. And he did not urge that precaution. The sun was already nearing the steamy horizon.

The sullen, lowering looks of the ill-favoured assemblage about the hatch foretold the fate which threatened her and him.

"But they won't shoot *you*, Sallie," he said, giving voice to his only fear in a shaky whisper, his soul in his honest eyes as he glanced wretchedly round at her.

She laid a clenched hand on the rail and opened it slightly. "Don't worry about me, Rube," she whispered back, very matter of fact, while he gazed as if fascinated at the thin blue phial, with its red danger-label, resting in her rosy palm. "I always carry a key that will unlock the last gate of all. So there's no need to worry about me. I just wish you'd say you forgive me all the trouble I've brought on you."

"There's nothing to forgive, lass," he asserted stolidly, and, looking away again as though her appealing regard had hurt him, was taken with a gulping in the throat.

Two or three of the mutineers had begun to knock loose the wedges securing the tarpaulin cover of the after-hatch, through which alone access to the ship's magazine was to be had.

"There's no use in trying to stop them at that," he said, as if to himself. "It's only a matter of minutes now, I suppose. And — "

"Dutch courage is cheap enough," said a contemptuous, sneering voice in the background, and the sound of shuffling footsteps succeeded it. The men on the main-deck

were gazing past him, handling their rifles, muttering hoarsely, moving to get more elbow-room. The girl beside him had turned at the words, but he kept his eyes steadfastly on the foremost of the fermenting, murderous rabble below.

CHAPTER II

"DUTCH COURAGE"

CAPTAIN DOVE had come up on deck, and was standing by the companion-hatch, drawing difficult breaths, swaying to the rise and sink of the ship on the long, slow, ceaseless swell.

He had only a greatcoat secured by a single button about his shoulders over his night-dress, and on his feet an old pair of carpet slippers. Sallie darted a blazing glance of indignation at Jasper Slyne who, instead of helping the sick old man, seemed only bent on aggravating him with his evil tongue.

"You coward!" she cried at that immaculate gentleman, and would have gone to the old man's aid but that he angrily waved her also aside as he tottered forward, changing his scowl by the way to that sleek, benevolent smile which he could always assume at his pleasure.

A slow silence followed on the low, suspicious rumble of voices with which the mutineers had greeted his most unexpected appearance. They had, of course, supposed him physically incapable of further interference with them and their plans. But, as it was, he did not look very dangerous in his grotesque dishabille.

As he reached the rail, Reuben Yoxall stepped to one side, touching his cap in his customary salute. Slyne had halted a couple of paces behind, and Sallie, too, had drawn back. Captain Dove stood alone at the top of the stairway,

in the forefront of the little group there, and looked contemplatively down at the men who, he knew very well, would listen to no appeal of his for his life. From his placid, benign demeanour then he might have been inspecting a Sunday-school.

His features were in themselves of an unctuous cast, smooth, flat, snub-nosed, clean-shaven as a rule, except for a straggling fringe of whisker. His white hair and weak, winking eyes added to his smugly sanctimonious expression. He was squat of build, unduly short in the legs and long of arm. And, altogether, he cut no very dashing figure in his ridiculous garments, one sleeve of his coat hanging limp and empty, the arm that should have filled it lying across his chest in a sling, his chin disfigured by a week's growth of stubble, his whiskers all unkempt.

But it had never been by his gallant presence that he had held to heel the cutthroats who composed his crew, and, even then, when they had him before them helpless, a certain target for their loaded rifles, not one of them seized the immediate opportunity.

He steadied himself with his free hand on the rail of the narrow stairway, and so stepped downward among them. Still no one else moved. It may have been that his almost inhuman daring daunted them in spite of themselves. But Sallie, in the background, was holding her breath. She knew he was courting a bloody death, and feared he would meet it there, before her shrinking eyes. That tragedy and all its unspeakable consequences were literally hanging on a hair-trigger.

He reached the level below, still smiling blandly, and, letting go the rail, shuffled forward, slowly but steadily enough, his slippers flapping at his heels with ludicrous

effect. Two or three of the men confronting him stepped to one side, gave him free passage into the throng, and closed in again behind him. He took no notice of anyone, but held on his way till he reached the ladder which led from the break of the poop to the quarter-deck.

He climbed that at his leisure, panting a little, his back toward them. They had faced about and were following his every movement with malevolent eyes. A single shot would have made a quick end of him, but no shot was fired. And, at the top of the ladder, he turned to speak.

"I'll send Mr. Hobson aft to issue your ammunition," he said, in a voice without any tremor of weakness. "Get two full bandoliers, each of you, and then file forward again while the others come aft for theirs."

And with that, leaving them to their own reflections, agape, absolutely dumfounded by his audacity, he made his way up on to the bridge, the skirts of his night-dress fluttering from under the shorter length of his heavy coat.

They fell to whispering among themselves, excited and distrustful. They had only a few loose rounds for their rifles, and Captain Dove alone knew how the ship's magazine might safely be entered. It would undoubtedly have cost some of them their lives to force that secret. No one of them would be willing to sacrifice himself for the common cause, and Captain Dove's unlooked-for concession of their chief need had no doubt mystified them altogether.

Hobson, the second mate, came aft a few minutes later, a beetle-browed, foxy-looking fellow, with a furtive smile of encouragement for his accomplices. At a sign from him they unshipped the hatches. He disappeared into the hold, a bunch of keys dangling from one wrist, and presently shouted up some order, in terms much more polite than he

had lately been in the habit of using, to them at least. A chain of living links was promptly formed from the magazine, and packed bandoliers, passed rapidly from hand to hand, soon reached its farther end. The men grinned meaningly at each other as they slung the web belts crosswise over their shoulders. For with these they were still more absolutely masters of the situation.

Reuben Yoxall, back at his dangerous post by the stairway, was watching them no less narrowly than before. It seemed the sheerest madness on Captain Dove's part to have disclosed to their ringleader the secret of the magazine, and no one could tell at what moment they might now assume the offensive. The sun was already dipping behind the sea-rim.

"We've changed our course," Sallie said to him in a puzzled whisper, and he nodded silently. The *Olive Branch* was heading inshore. The outline of the coast had grown clearer under the last of the evening light. Here and there against its smudgy-brown background showed dark green blots that were mangroves or clumps of palm. A thin, white ribbon of surf was distinctly visible on the distant beach.

Captain Dove was at the starboard extremity of the bridge, his binoculars at his eyes. He laid them down, and pointed out to the third mate, at his elbow, some landmark directly ahead. Then he climbed carefully down to the quarter-deck and began to make his way aft again. Behind him, rifles in hand, came creeping another strong contingent of his strangely numerous crew. Half a dozen of those nearest him had drawn and fixed the long sword-bayonet each wore at his hip.

The old man in greatcoat and slippers paused at the

after-rail of the quarter-deck. The bayonets were almost at his shoulder blades. But the three anxious onlookers aft could not even warn him of that additional danger, to which he seemed quite oblivious.

The crowd at the open hatch looked round at him, as of one accord, and the bulk turned on their heels towards him, but a few remained facing the three still, silent figures on the poop. Sunset and the final instant of crisis had come together.

From among the men grouped about the hatch one stepped forward, as if to speak. Captain Dove held up his hand and the fellow hesitated, with bent brows. A quick, angry growl arose from among his neighbours. But Captain Dove was not to be hurried. He cleared his throat and spat indifferently into the scuppers.

"I've a little job ashore for you lads to-night," he said then, in a tone audible to all, "a job that'll fill our empty pockets properly — if it's properly carried out. We haven't been so lucky of late that we can afford to lay off just yet. What money there is on board means no more than a few dollars apiece, share and share alike. I know where I can lay my hands on a thousand at least for each of us. If you think that's worth your while, get away forward now to your supper; the others are coming aft for their ammunition."

He ceased abruptly, and for a moment no one answered him or made any move. He had succeeded in raising their curiosity, and so gained some trifling respite at least for himself. They were turning over in their dense minds, however suspiciously, this new and plausible suggestion of his.

It was no news that there was very little money on board, and — they were of a class which always can be led to grasp at the shadow if that looks larger to them than the sub-

stance itself. They hesitated — and they were lost. Captain Dove had descended among them, and as if the subject were closed, was pushing his way through the gathering with a good-humoured, masterful, " Get forward. Get away forward, now."

And they gave way again before him, apparently forgetful of their purpose there, quite willing, since they held the power securely in their own hands, to await the outcome of one more night. In the morning, and rich, as he promised, or no worse off if his promise failed, they could just as conveniently close their account with him. As the others came crowding aft, those already possessed of bandoliers began to file forward, exchanging rough jokes with their fellows.

Captain Dove addressed a parting remark to them from the poop. " We won't be going ashore till midnight," said he, " and I *must* get some sleep or I won't be fit for the work we've to do there. I'm sick enough as it is. Get that hatch-cover on again as soon as you can, and keep to your own end of the ship till the time comes. I'll send you forward a hogshead of rum to help it along."

" Ay, ay, sir," a voice answered him cheerily from out of the gathering darkness, and Sallie saw that he almost smiled to himself as he staggered toward the companion-hatch.

There he would have fallen, spent, but that she, at his shoulder, caught hold of him and held him up till Slyne came to her assistance. And they together got him safely below.

" Gimme brandy," he gasped, as he lay limply back in the chair on which they had set him. His lips were white. His overworked heart had almost failed him under the strain he had put on it.

The stimulant still served its purpose, however. He sat up again, revived.

" But that was an uncommon close call! " he commented, half to himself. " I felt blind-sure I'd have a bayonet through my back before I could play my last card. And I didn't believe I'd win out even with that. But here I am, and — " He turned to the girl at his side.

" Don't stand there idling, Sallie," he ordered querulously, " when there's so much to be done. Tell Ambrizette to bring me a bull's-eye lantern. Go up and see if the decks are clear yet. Send Reuben Yoxall down to me as soon as they are. And then get ready for going ashore. You'll have to wear something that won't be seen — but take a couple of Arab cloaks in a bundle with you as well."

At that Jasper Slyne spoke, divided between doubt and anger.

" What devilment have you in your mind now, Dove? " he demanded. " You surely don't mean to — You told me yourself that there's nothing but dangerous desert ashore here."

" Never you mind what I mean to do, *Mister* Slyne," Captain Dove answered him with a gratified grin, picking up the brandy bottle again. " When I want any advice from you, I'll let you know. And, if I ever ask you again to help me into my clothes, you'll maybe be more obliging next time.

" Dutch courage is cheap enough, Mister Slyne," said the old man tauntingly. " So I'm going ashore, — into the dangerous desert, — in a few minutes, with Sallie. But there's nothing you need be afraid of, for you're going to stay safe on board."

CHAPTER III

EL FARISH

ON the stealthy-looking little grey steamship at anchor under the obscure stars not even a riding-light was visible. But she was close to the desolate coast, well out of the way of all respectable traffic. And a solitary figure, squatted in the bows, pipe in mouth, pannikin of rum within easy reach, was keeping a perfunctory anchor-watch, staring idly seaward so that he saw nothing of a tiny light which flashed three times from the shore in belated response to a similar signal from a screened port in the poop-cabin.

But for him, the decks were deserted. From the crew's quarters came frequent outbursts of ribald talk and uproarious laughter, the odour of food, the clank and clatter of tin-ware empty or full. The crew were at supper and satisfied for the present.

From the companion-hatch on the poop four soundless shadows emerged. Two of them were carrying cautiously a long, flat fabric which they in a moment or two converted into a fourteen-foot canvas boat. These two lowered that overside. One of the others, a bundle in hand, slipped easily down into it by means of a rope made fast to a stanchion. The last, cursing under his breath, was helped over the rail, with one foot in a loop of the same line, by the two remaining on deck.

Sallie, safely seated in the cockleshell below, laid a pair

of muffled oars in the rowlocks and pushed quietly off from under the dripping overhang of the ship. Captain Dove, crouching in its stern, whispered curt directions to her. She could just see Reuben Yoxall and Jasper Slyne standing side by side at the steamer's taffrail, and then the black bulk of the *Olive Branch* became merged in the blacker water.

Once out of earshot of the ship, she set to rowing in earnest, a strong, steady stroke, like one well accustomed to that exercise; and Captain Dove, with an eye cocked at a helpful star twinkling dimly through the heat-haze, kept her heading straight for the shore. The boom of the breakers soon began to grow louder, but, even when it had become almost deafening, she did not look round. They had got into broken water and it was taking her all her time to handle the oars.

She was breathless and all but exhausted before they at length shot dizzily out of the wild turmoil of the surf into a tranquil, land-locked lagoon, concealed from seaward by a long sand-spit, which served it as a breakwater in such smooth weather.

" Way enough," said the old man gruffly, and, as Sallie shipped her oars, the light craft lost speed. Presently, its prow took the sand, and at last they were free of the ominous, phosphorescent black fins which had followed them from where they had left the ship.

" Strike a match," ordered Captain Dove, and held out a stump of candle. " Light this and stick it on the gunwale. Now, on with your cloak and hood — and lend me a hand with mine."

The tiny flame at her elbow burned steadily enough in the still night, while Sallie was slipping on over her dark

dress the white robe he had bidden her bring with her. As soon as she had hooded her head and drawn the veil well over her features, she turned to help him. She was smoothing the crumpled burnous about his shoulders while he tugged irritably at it with his only available hand, grumbling at her in a low monotone, when she heard a sudden splashing behind her and, glancing round, saw a number of other white-robed figures wading out through the shallows towards the boat and its flickering light. Captain Dove took their coming as a matter of course, and she sat down again silently, though that cost her a great effort. It was unspeakably eerie there, in the very heart of a darkness that seemed to be whispering hints of such horrors as only exist in the dark.

The old man exchanged a few low words in doggerel Arabic with the strangers. Two of them, tall, brown, fierce-faced fellows, slung over their shoulders the long guns with which they were armed, stooped and lifted Sallie lightly up, carried her to the shore dry-shod. She was still shivering nervously when two more deposited Captain Dove at her side, and then the canvas boat was brought high and dry. At a curt remark from him a makeshift litter was formed of four rifles and, seated on that, he was carried away as if he had been a mere featherweight, Sallie following close behind on foot, uncomfortably conscious of the shadows at her own shoulders.

It was hard work for her in the darkness and ankle-deep in the soft, loose sand at every step, although his bearers made little enough of their burden. But farther on the footing grew firmer, and then they came to a rough, trodden path.

That led them to the still darker mouth of a narrow de-

file between two low, rocky bluffs, and from the summit of one of these there suddenly rang a harsh challenge. It was answered at once by their escort, and they went on without pause through that pitch-black, crooked passage with its invisible, whispering guard, until, emerging at an unexpected turn from its landward outlet, a most astonishing panorama presented itself to the girl's startled eyes.

Within a titanic natural amphitheatre formed by the rock-ridge which, except for the cleft they had entered by, enclosed it completely, there had been pitched an encampment that occupied its entire arena. Everywhere there were dry desert fires, burning redly, with little flame, and the vault of heaven overhead was like some vast crimson dome reflecting a light whose effect was weird and unreal to the last degree. Sallie, gazing about her with lips a little apart behind her veil, could scarcely convince herself that she was not dreaming.

In the foreground, on one side of the wide way which led straight to the heart of the camp, there were picketed rows upon rows of whinnying horses, and on the other almost as many restless *mehari* camels, among which a number of negroes, presumably slaves, were briskly at work. Past these was a wide, open space, at whose other edge stood a flagpole from which a great green flag with a golden harp on it fluttered and flapped in the red firelight on the first of the evening breeze. Under that was a group of men, all in flowing garments, one seated in state, the others standing about him. A dozen paces behind them a white pavilion that seemed rose-pink, with a heavily curtained porch, occupied a roomy, level expanse by itself. Surrounding and encircling it on three sides, but at a re-

spectful distance, stretching as far back as the foot of the steep rock-rampart which hemmed them in, was ranged an orderly assemblage of horsehair tents, whose inhabitants, loose-robed men, swart women, and half-naked children, were all very busy about them in the open air. Everywhere there was life and bustle. . . .

Beneath the searching rays of the sun it would all, no doubt, have appeared travel-stained and sordid and tawdry to a degree. But the desert night and the dim stars brooding above it had imbued it with all their own magic and mystery.

Captain Dove's carriers strode forward with him and set him carefully on his feet before the green flag, under which, on a great gilt chair, sat one who was evidently their chief, a man in the very prime of life and still younger yet than his years. Sallie eyed him over her veil with anxious interest. The group behind his chair was regarding her with no less curiosity. The attention of the multitude among the tents had been attracted to the new arrivals, and many inquisitive onlookers, more women than men, were beginning to gather about the boundaries of the area sacred to their Emir and his officers.

That dignitary got hastily up and came forward. He was tall and stalwart on foot, a fine figure of a man even in his loose, shapeless garments, with a bronzed, hook-nosed, handsome face of his own, a heavy moustache, the brooding, patient, predatory eyes of a desert vulture. And, as he confronted Captain Dove, over whom he seemed to tower threateningly, the hood of the *selham* slipped on to his shoulders, disclosing a flaming shock of red hair.

"At last!" he said, after a long time, in the difficult voice of one amazed almost beyond words. The muscles of his

lean, brown face were working visibly. His eyes had become inflamed, his fingers were twitching.

"At last!" he said again, as if finally convinced in spite of himself, and licked his lips.

But Captain Dove met his wickedest glance unwinkingly, and made him no answer at all.

For a moment longer they two stood gazing thus at each other, the onlookers silent and still. And then the big man's blazing eyes shifted to the face of the girl at Captain Dove's elbow. Sallie's veil had slipped to her chin, but she had been unconscious of that till then. She pulled it up across the bridge of her nose again hastily. The red-haired Emir's scowl had relaxed; he was scanning her with a very different expression to that he had shown Captain Dove, but one which alarmed her no less.

He turned to the group behind him and, at a word, it melted away. The onlookers in the distance also went about their own business again. A black slave-boy came staggering forward with a heavy chair, and set that down side by side with the other there. Captain Dove seated himself at once, without ceremony.

The Emir, biting his lip, followed suit, and sat for a time sunk in his own reflections. He seemed to have mastered for the moment his first almost overwhelming impulse at sight of that venerable-looking adventurer, and had evidently some other and much more pleasant idea in his mind.

"That's a high-stepping filly you've brought with you," said he at length in a puzzled tone, and glanced round at Sallie again. She was standing at Captain Dove's other shoulder, her head bent, her hands clasped before her, in helpless, patient suspense. Captain Dove had gruffly informed her, before they had left the ship, that she would be

perfectly safe in his company, but even his own safety seemed to be hanging on a very slender thread.

" I wonder, now," the Emir went on, " if it's to seek trade that you've come ashore here again — after all these years." His face once more darkened, as if over some recollection that rankled sorely, but which he was doing his best to dismiss from his thoughts in the meantime.

" I've some trifles in hand that might interest you if it is trade you're after," said he, speaking amicably with an effort, " such truck as gold-dust, and jewels, and silk — and ivory, too, galore."

The black boy had come back with an unwieldy tray of a dull yellow metal on which were set two cool, moist, earthenware *chatties* and a couple of uncouth drinking-cups. Captain Dove, with unerring instinct, laid his hand on the flagon which held strong drink, poured out for himself a liberal helping of the sticky *magia* it contained, and swallowed that off without a word. After the Emir had also helped himself the boy would have carried the tray away, but Captain Dove bade him set it down and dealt him an indignant cuff, so that he fled empty-handed, with an anguished yelp.

" It wasn't exactly to pay you a polite call that I came ashore to this God-forsaken hole, Farish," the old man at last remarked, with uncompromising frankness. " The fact of the matter is — I'm in a bit of a bog just now. And I've come to get you to give me a hand out of it — if your price isn't too high for me to pay."

The Emir stared at him, open-mouthed.

" You were always the bold one, Captain Brown," said he, reminiscently, after a lengthy interval, " but this beats all! And it's to the man you set ashore here, alone, long

years ago, to die in the desert like a mad dog, that you come demanding a hand to get you out of a bit of a bog! You've surely forgotten — "

"I'm not one who forgets," Captain Dove interrupted sourly. "And you'll maybe remember, since you think it's worth while to hark back to such old stories, that I didn't shoot you down at once, as I might have done — for disobedience of orders. I gave you a chance for your life, anyhow. And you've made a very good thing out of it. You've risen in the world, Farish, since you were the second mate of the old *Fer de Lance* — and I was Captain John Bunyan Brown. I'm Captain Dove now, by the way."

"And how did you know who it was would be here to-night?" the *soi-disant* Emir demanded, turning it all over in his own mind.

"The Spaniards at the Rio de Oro told me, when I called in there the other day, that they were expecting the Emir El Farish shortly, from this direction, and, of course, I pricked up my ears at the name. I asked a few simple questions about him, and it didn't take a great deal of brain-power to figure out that the famous Emir was just my old second mate turned land pirate on his own account. They wanted me to wait on the chance of a cargo from your caravan, but — I had other fish to fry at the time.

"Then, coming up the coast, I caught sight of your smoke from the steamer's bridge — at least I judged it would be yours. I reckoned you'd be camping here, you see, and, when you answered my signal, I was quite sure. So — I'm in a bit of a bog, as I told you. And it'll pay you to give me a hand out of it — if your price isn't too high."

"The price that you'll have to pay for my help you can guess now without my telling you," returned the Emir in a

muffled whisper, and nodded meaningly over his shoulder. "And you'll find me a fair man to deal with, so long as you deal fairly by me."

Captain Dove signified his comprehension by means of a non-committal grunt. He stooped down and helped himself awkwardly to another drink before making any other answer.

"But — you've got a wife already," he whispered back, at a shrewd guess, as he sat up again, smiling blandly.

"I won't have her long, poor thing!" said the other, some tinge of real regret in his tone. "And I'll miss her, too, when she's gone, let me tell you." He sat silent for a moment, musing, and then, "'Twas a notable revenge that I took on *them*-all!" he muttered darkly. "But I'll miss her for herself as well — after all these years.

"It's the desert has killed her," he said, pulling at his moustache. "I've had a doctor-fellow with her for a while past — I saved him out of an exploring party we cut up near Jebado. 'Twas nearly three weeks ago he told me she hadn't a month to live. The sand's got into her lungs, he says — and I've promised to shovel him into a sand-pit alive the day she dies, to see how he likes the sand in his own lungs, the useless scum!"

He sighed stormily, and then seemed to bethink himself again of the girl listening behind. In answer to a call of his, in a caressing voice, there came from the big tent in the background a woman, veiled as Sallie was but clad in silk instead of cotton, who bowed submissively to what he had to say to her and then held out a slender, bloodless, burning hand to Sallie.

"Go with her," ordered Captain Dove. "You'll be all right. I'll shout for you when I want you again."

And Sallie, glad so to escape from the Emir's glance, went willingly enough. It would not have helped her in any way then to disobey Captain Dove. But her hand, within the other woman's, was as cold as ice.

CHAPTER IV

THE MASQUE OF DEATH

THEY passed together through the curtained porch of the pavilion, and Sallie looked about her with blinking eyes as the Emir's wife led her toward a long, low, cushioned divan, with a tall screen of black carved ebony behind it, which stood in one of the corners formed by the partitions within.

The entire interior of the tent was brilliantly lighted by many lamps of a dull yellow metal, swung from under the billowy silken ceiling. Underfoot were carpets and rugs of the most costly, chosen with taste. The inner divisions seemed almost solid behind their heavy hangings of embroidery and filigree work. About the couch in the corner were grouped a number of languorous women slaves, all very richly dressed. The whole effect was one of barbaric splendour and luxury.

Her women crossed their arms on their breasts and bowed before the Emir's wife, their golden bangles jingling. She drew Sallie down on the couch beside her and waved them away. They backed into another corner with heads still bent, but stealing furtive glances at the fair stranger. Sallie had let her veil fall; the heat was stifling.

The Emir's wife laid a hand on her heart and panted, as if she had been running. A hectic flush had coloured her sunken cheeks. Sallie saw that she must once have been a very good-looking girl.

" How did you come to our camp? " she asked, suppressing with a great effort the cough her labouring chest could scarcely contain. " Is there another caravan near, or — a ship? "

" A ship," Sallie answered gently, forgetting all her own urgent troubles in quick compassion for that poor soul. And the dying girl's feverish eyes grew suddenly eager.

" A ship! " she repeated breathlessly, and for a moment or two seemed to be searching Sallie's expressively pitiful features for some further information, which she found there. The anxiety in her eyes changed to appeal, and then certainty.

" You'll help — me," she whispered. " I *know* you will." And she began to cough.

Two or three of her women came running forward to offer her such first aid as lay in their power. Another had hurried off through a curtained doorway which led inward, and promptly returned, followed by two enormous negroes, vile-looking rascals, each wearing a scanty tunic of leopard-skins which hung from one shoulder and did not reach to his-knees, with a broad waist-belt which also served to contain a short, heavy scimitar, in a metal scabbard. Between them walked a man, a white man to judge by his hands, since his head was completely masked in a hood of coarse scarlet cotton, with only a couple of careless eyelet-holes and a rough round mouth cut in it. He was dressed in a worn drill tunic and riding-breeches and pigskin puttees, and carried himself, a thin, limber, muscular figure, with careless ease.

Sallie took him to be that doctor of whom the Emir had spoken, and shuddered at thought of the dreadful death with which the Emir had threatened him. His guards'

cruel faces grew still more watchful and grim as he hastened, limping a little, toward the couch, while they were still saluting its occupant.

Sallie had risen from it and was standing with one arm about the other girl's heaving shoulders, adjusting her veil. The cough had ceased again, but its victim had not yet recovered her voice. The man in the mask glanced most unhappily at her and then at Sallie. But it was not concern on his own account that his steady grey eyes expressed.

He was about to speak, when the Emir's wife held up a thin, transparent hand. "Wait," she begged weakly. "There is so little time — and my strength — "

He pulled a glass tube from one of his pockets and gave her a tabloid. She swallowed it down, with a mouthful of water, indifferently, but it soon did her good. She signed her women aside, and looked imploringly up at Sallie.

"I can't live through another night," she said, "and — neither will this man, unless you help me to help him. You *will* do that, won't you? He's an Englishman — a doctor — he has done all he possibly could for me — and I *cannot* die while I know that his life hangs on mine. It's too horrible — "

Sallie sat down again and clasped the wasted, writhing body closely to her in her strong, young arms.

"I'll do all I possibly can to help him," she promised in a quick whisper. The grey eyes behind the horrible scarlet hood had seemed to say that they would not hold her responsible for any promise given to lighten that poor creature's last hours. And the Emir's wife lay back against her shoulder with an exhausted sob of relief.

"I'm really an American," said a pleasant and very grateful voice from behind the mask which was gazing down

at them so inscrutably now, " and no doctor at all." He was speaking to Sallie; the Emir's wife was still gasping for breath. " But — you can see for yourself how very harmful this nervous excitement must be to her."

" We must humour her — whatever may happen," his glance seemed to add, and Sallie nodded in quick understanding and sympathy.

She had been wondering what she, so helpless and uncertain herself, could possibly do to reassure the dying girl and help the man who was doomed.

" If I could get back on board the ship," she said somewhat uncertainly, in answer to the appealing look with which the Emir's wife was once more regarding her, " I would bring or send a boat ashore — "

The other girl's wan face displayed renewed life and animation.

" Soon after midnight," she whispered eagerly. " You must give me till then to do my part. But soon after midnight he will be waiting beyond the outermost of the guards at the shore-end of the ravine which leads from our camp. He'll be wearing that woman's cloak and veil, and carrying a bucket — I sometimes send her to the beach for sea-water to bathe my feet." She pointed to one of her slaves, but at that the man in the mask intervened.

" I couldn't do that. Your husband would — "

She held up a hand again, and he said no more, only shaking his head. He seemed to have forgotten that she was not to be contradicted.

" The woman is mine," said the Emir's wife, " and my husband will not hurt a hair of her head while she obeys me. He has sworn that on the Cross. He will keep his oath —

and you have my word as well that she shall come to no harm. You need have no scruples, then! "

She looked impatiently up at the scarlet mask bending over her, not to be satisfied until it bowed in submission to her authority there. But Sallie could read in the steadfast grey eyes behind it a dumb determination that the slave girl should run no such risk, and she did not think it needful at that moment to say anything about the other difficulties to be overcome. She had promised that she would do all she possibly could to help the man in the mask, and believed she could help him best in the meantime by keeping her own troubles to herself.

She did not even know as yet what Captain Dove's immediate intentions toward her were, or whether she herself would ever see the *Olive Branch* again. But — she would know before very long, and it would be time enough then to explain her own plight.

" Feel my pulse now, before you go," the pseudo-doctor's patient commanded, and he did so, drawing out his watch, while she continued to plan for his flight.

" I'll send for you again before midnight," she said rapidly, for his guards had begun to show signs of unrest as his visit grew more prolonged, " and you must bring your — your — " She tapped her chest, very tenderly, with her free hand.

" Stethoscope? " he suggested, and she nodded quickly.

" You'll come in your cloak — it will be cold then. My women will draw a screen about us. As soon as you are safely behind it, slip off your shoes and gaiters while they are changing your cloak and hood. There will not be a moment to spare. And now — you must go."

He released her wrist and stood upright again.

" I shall come whenever you send for me, of course," he assured her soothingly, although his eyes, meeting Sallie's for an instant, betrayed the stubborn will behind them. " And I'm far more grateful than I can express for your good-will toward me. So now you'll rest quietly, won't you? And try not to worry needlessly about — anything at all. You're not afraid, I know. And neither am I."

He bowed to them both in his hideous hood, and went back to his scowling guards.

The Emir's dying wife lay very quietly in Sallie's arms for some time after he had gone. She was quite exhausted again. Her women, in a group at a little distance, were watching with jealous eyes the fair stranger who had supplanted them with such ease. The only sounds that broke the silence were the sick girl's laboured breathing, the occasional hoarse, angry rumble of Captain Dove's voice outside. Sallie was listening anxiously for that. She could hear no word of what he said, but — she wanted to be quite sure that he was still there. It was not her own fate alone that now depended on what these strangely dragging minutes should bring to pass.

" Lay me back on the cushions now," begged the girl in her arms. " I feel better — in every way. And — tell me how you came here, in the nick of time. I'm so thankful — but you know that, and I mustn't talk too much, I have so little strength left, and —

" Who is that shouting? "

" It's Captain Dove," Sallie answered in haste. " He brought me here. I must go to him now, but I'll come back before — " She had no time to say more, for Captain Dove had called her again, in a very angry voice.

He was shaking his only available fist impotently at the

high heavens when she stepped timidly out from under the curtained porch of the tent.

She hesitated, but for no more than a moment, and then, drawing her veil closer, went on across the sand, with beating heart.

"You called me, Captain Dove?" she said, as she stopped at the old man's shoulder. And he ceased blaspheming to glare round at her as though she had been some intrusive stranger, his face very puffed and repulsive in the red firelight.

He did not answer at once, but reached again for the earthenware flagon. It was lying on its side empty, for she had tipped it over with a stealthy foot.

His angry glance grew darker with suspicion, but her eyes were downcast.

"Come round in front," he ordered harshly, and she had once more to submit herself to the Emir's appraising glance.

He and Captain Dove had still much to say to each other, too, while she stood patiently there, like a slave for sale. They fell to arguing with much heat some point in dispute between them, an argument she could not follow since they were speaking some jargon of Arabic strange to her. But she knew very well that it was about her they were wrangling, and a cold fear clutched cruelly at her heart.

At last, however, the Emir appeared to give in to his visitor, and Captain Dove, after a final ineffectual snatch at the flagon, got on to his feet, since even that hint seemed to be thrown away on his host.

"We'll get off to the ship again," he said in English, and Sallie could almost have cried aloud in relief from such sore suspense.

"May I go back to the tent — just for a minute — to say

good-bye? " she begged in a breathless whisper, and turned and ran.

The Emir's wife glanced eagerly up at her as she reappeared.

" I'm going back on board now," Sallie told her with shining eyes, which suddenly grew dim as she thought of the other girl's loneliness there. She sank on her knees beside the couch, and the Emir's wife, leaning forward, slipped a frail arm about her neck; and so they two, sisters in trouble, kissed each other good-bye for all time.

" You'll be sure to send the boat — soon after midnight? " the other asked, but with no shadow of doubt in her low, weak tones.

" I'll come myself, if I possibly can," Sallie promised, " and, if not, I'll send a safe friend — soon after midnight."

As she was rising, she saw on her bosom a little locket which hung from a thin gold chain. She lifted a hand to it, and hesitated uncertainly.

" It's all I have in the world that's my own," said the Emir's wife in a pleading whisper, " all I can offer you but my empty thanks. I'd like to think to-night that you will sometimes remember me. Will you not keep it, for my sake? "

" I'll wear it always — I'll never forget you — and oh! I'm so sorry that I must go," cried Sallie, sorely distressed, and had to hurry away without more words. Captain Dove had twice called her. There were tears in her eyes as she ran back across the sand to where, under the green flag, he was wrathfully waiting for her, and she scarcely heard his harsh order to hurry up.

Some of the Emir's men had come forward with a couple of litters. She seated herself in one, although she would

much rather have walked, and, as soon as Captain Dove was ready, they were carried off, the Emir shouting a valedictory message to the old man.

"You keep your bargain and I'll keep mine," Captain Dove called back, and snorted contemptuously.

"That damned fellow talks to me as if I had been *his* second mate!" he commented, and snorted again.

From the mouth of the dark defile which led toward the shore, Sallie looked back over one shoulder, almost as an escaped prisoner might, at the bizarre, fantastic scene the still camp made in that strange crimson light. And the big, red-haired Emir standing motionless under his great green flag, whose fluttering folds seen from that distance seemed of the colour of blood, waved a hand to her ere she disappeared.

She shivered, instinctively. She had been dumbly afraid of the man, and that although she was possessed of a courage such as could look grim death itself in the empty eyeholes and smile. She was correspondingly thankful when, the gorge and its sentinels safely behind her, she found herself once more facing the open sea.

Captain Dove's carriers set him down alongside the boat, lying high and dry on the sands where they had left it. Having set it afloat, they lifted him carefully into it, and her also. A few shallow yards from the shore, she slipped off her white cloak and head-covering at an order from the old man, and so set to rowing again.

Once, one of her oars touched some invisible body swimming parallel with the boat, and a lightning-like flash of phosphorus showed a curved black fin that darted to a little distance and then turned back toward them. It was risky work crossing the bar, but both she and Captain Dove

knew just what they were about, and presently they shot free of the surf into comparative safety.

"Starboard a little," he told her then, and ten or twelve minutes' pulling took them back to the *Olive Branch*, which he must have found by sheer instinct, since the ship was showing no lights.

They approached it almost soundlessly from astern, so that the sleepy look-out on the fo'c'sle-head neither heard nor saw them. For even the stars were invisible then through the curtain of vapour overhanging the coast.

Reuben Yoxall, the mate, was awaiting them at the poop-rail. He threw Sallie a line, and running to the companion-hatch, called Jasper Slyne up from the little saloon below. The two of them hoisted Captain Dove up the side, and after him Sallie, as light and agile as any boy. The canvas boat was easily got to the rail, folded flat and returned to its hiding-place.

Sallie stayed on deck, and Yoxall was not long in rejoining her there. Slyne and Captain Dove had sat down to a leisurely supper below. The *plup!* of a cork popping in the saloon broke the silence just before seven bells struck. They had half an hour yet till midnight.

CHAPTER V

AFLOAT AND ASHORE

"WHO'S that, Rube? — there, by the hatch," whispered Sallie, and pointed to where a pair of white eyeballs had been uncannily visible for a moment and then disappeared. She was nervous and overwrought in the midst of so many uncertainties.

Yoxall had stepped quickly in front of her. He caught sight of a shadow crawling away in the dark on the deck below.

"One of the niggers," he told her, and turned. "He's come scouting aft more than once while you were ashore. Most of the men are asleep, I suppose, but there are sure to be some standing guard — they won't run any risk of being caught napping by Captain Dove."

She fell into step with him again, and presently, pacing the poop at his side, slipped an arm into one of his. He shivered a little.

"Aren't you feeling all right?" she asked anxiously. "You're not going to have fever, are you?"

"No, lass," he answered at once. "Not much! I'm all right, of course. It would never do for me to fall sick now, would it?"

"It would be the last straw!" she agreed, and shivered also. For she was counting on him in case the worst should come to the worst.

"I don't know what I'd do without you, Rube," she said. And the big Englishman blushed like any boy as she peered up into his face. "You're the only real friend I have in the world. If it weren't for you — I'd be quite desperate; I'm so unhappy here now."

Reuben Yoxall pressed the arm that lay within his, and gulped. "Then why won't you come away out of it, Sallie?" he asked in a husky voice he could scarcely control. "It wouldn't be so very difficult — if Captain Dove just manages to keep the men in hand till we make some port. And we must call somewhere soon, for we're short of coal.

"I have some money laid by — I'll work harder than ever for you. There's a snug little farm in Cumberland that one of these days will be mine, and till then the old folk would make you and me more than welcome there." He was speaking very quickly, bent on making the most of that unusual opportunity.

"I'm not much of a man, I know," he went on, "but — such as I am, I'm yours. And I'll always be yours, to do whatever you like with. You might come to care more for me, Sallie, if you knew me better. Will you not try? Just give me the chance, and I'll soon have you safely out of the Old Man's clutches. But — so long as you insist on sticking to him, I can't do any more for you than I'm doing."

Her eyes grew dim as she thought of the dog-like devotion which he had shown her, although she had so often told him that she could never repay it as he would have liked.

"I wish I could, Rube," she assured him again, "but — I can't. I'm *not* ungrateful, and I hate to hurt you, but —

I just can't. And you wouldn't want me to sell myself — even for a home and a husband, would you, Rube? I'll never marry anyone. Jasper Slyne says that Captain Dove's going to give me to him — but he doesn't know. . . . And — I'm not afraid."

Reuben Yoxall sighed, very softly. But she heard, and her own heart grew heavier. Life had become so difficult, and there was still so much to be done, so many troubles to think about, while she did not even know yet what Captain Dove was going to do next.

She had just finished telling Yoxall about the man in the scarlet mask and what she had promised to do for him, when sounds of stealthy bustle from forward told her that the mutineers were once more mustering on deck. She called down to Captain Dove, and he shortly came up from the saloon, followed by Jasper Slyne in a neutral-tinted, workmanlike semi-uniform, at whose belt hung a heavy-calibre Colt revolver.

Under the sharp spur of necessity, Captain Dove appeared to have quite overcome the physical weakness by which he had been oppressed. He stepped briskly to the stair-head rail and thence looked down on the shadowy, moving mass of armed men who had by that time gathered at the after-hatch again. Aware of his presence, they ceased to shuffle about. A tense silence ensued, and Captain Dove cleared his throat.

"Are all hands aft?" he asked sharply, and "Ay, ay, sir," a voice answered. "All hands but the engine-room crew. D'ye want them too?"

"I do not," he declared, and Sallie felt dumbly thankful that the engineers and their underlings were still, apparently, loyal to him.

"Where's Mr. Hobson — and the third mate?" he demanded, and, "Here," answered simultaneously two other very sullen, suspicious voices.

"Listen, then, all of you," ordered Captain Dove, bristling in the dark at that traitorous pair, and, raising his voice again, "I've got a fine plum ripe for your picking tonight, lads!" cried he at his heartiest. "There's a caravan camped ashore here, on its way to the Rio de Oro, with close on a hundred camel-loads of such things as silk and ivory — and jewels — and gold — and girls. I got a word of it from a friend of mine at the Rio when we were in there, and — now's our chance! You can see the flare of the camp-fires on the sky beyond the beach. I've been in here before and I know the place. If you follow me now as you've followed me in the past, I'll guarantee that you'll open your eyes at what's waiting for you ashore."

Slyne, safe in the background, listening, laughed furtively to himself.

"But — if you're going back on me now, I give it up. Strike a light and put a bullet through me right away, if you feel like that. I've only one hand — I won't lift even that against you. And my share of what little money there is on board you can divide among you."

A general murmur of approval greeted this blatant speech. And not even the two malcontent mates could pick any hole in that proposal. A faint crimson glow amid the darkness beyond the surf on the shore served to corroborate his statement in part. That he meant to accompany them was his strongest guarantee of good faith. They were evidently ready and willing, for such a prospect as he had held out to them, to follow him wherever he liked to lead them.

The two mates began to tell the men off to the boats and get these swung outboard. A temporary atmosphere of peace and good-will prevailed.

Captain Dove turned to Reuben Yoxall. "You'll stay on board," he whispered very brusquely, "in charge of the ship. I'll tell the chief engineer to lend you two or three men, and you'll see to it that *they* don't lay their hands on any more guns.

"You'll stick by me," he told Slyne, in the background, and Slyne merely shrugged his shoulders impatiently as the old man passed on to where Sallie was waiting to hear what her part was to be. She did not know in the least what to make of his newly-declared intentions.

"Am I to go with you?" she asked on the spur of the moment. And Captain Dove stared at her.

"No, you are *not*," he declared emphatically. "D'you want to be shot — or kidnapped — or what! Get away down below, girl, and stay there till I come aboard again. You must be mad!"

She turned obediently toward the companion-hatch, and stopped there. He went forward then, the men making way for him readily, and disappeared into the engine-room. When he climbed carefully back on deck through the fiddley-hatch in the skylight, he found all the boats afloat and only one boat's crew remaining on board, under charge of the second mate, Hobson, with the evident aim of making sure that he did not somehow give them the slip or otherwise take any advantage of them. In response to a shout from him, Jasper Slyne went jauntily forward, and, with commendable promptitude, let himself down the falls overside. One of these, unhooked, served Captain Dove for a sling, and he was soon seated at the boat's tiller. The

men followed swiftly, and the second mate went last, no doubt satisfied by then that all would be well.

"Give way, lads!" cried Captain Dove to those at the sweeps, "and we'll show the others the short road ashore. I'm in no end of a hurry to get what's coming to me from that caravan."

Midnight lay very black on the bight where the *Olive Branch* was riding easily to a single anchor; as the dark hours sped they seemed to grow always darker. The boats which had just put off from her were almost instantly hidden from Sallie's sight. She stepped quietly out on deck beside Reuben Yoxall.

"Rube," she said in a low, determined voice. "I must be going too, now. Will you help me to get out the canvas boat?"

He stared at her, as Captain Dove had done, and swallowed down a lump in his throat.

"It's madness now!" he declared. "But — I'll go myself. You must stay where you are. It would be worse than madness for you —"

She was smiling very gratefully up into his unhappy, stubborn face.

"We'll go together, Rube," she said, "or not at all. And, even although it does seem hopeless, I know you wouldn't want me to break my promise. So you get the boat launched while I go and tell Mr. Brasse."

She turned and ran lightly down the steps and along the main-deck, leaving the mate, sorely perturbed and uncertain, to carry out her instructions or not, as he chose. As she reached the engine-room skylight on the quarter-deck an unobtrusive shadow emerged from it and would have passed her with a nod on its way toward the bridge.

" Mr. Brasse," she said appealingly, and it halted to peer at her through a single eye-glass, after touching its cap in a very precise salute.

" Miss Sallie? " it answered in a surprised but courteous tone which told that the speaker was, or had once been, a gentleman.

" I'm going ashore," she went on in a hurry, " and Mr. Yoxall is going with me. Will you look after things for him until we get back? Every one else has gone already."

" I have Captain Dove's orders to be on the bridge — for another purpose," the chief engineer of the *Olive Branch* informed her, " and I'll do my best, of course, to make sure that nothing goes wrong in the chief mate's absence. But — is it safe for you — "

" Quite safe," she assured him. " And — Mr. Brasse, if I bring — I'm going ashore to try to save a man — a white man the Arabs mean to murder to-night. If I manage to bring him on board, will you help me to hide him? — so that Captain Dove won't know? "

The chief engineer of the *Olive Branch* was obviously much perplexed. But he was also obviously much better disposed toward Sallie than to Captain Dove.

" If he's willing to work in the stokehold," he stipulated, " I don't think Captain Dove would ever know he's on board the ship. And then he can slip ashore at the first safe port we manage to make."

Sallie's lower lip trembled a little. She did not quite know how to thank the punctilious engineer who had proved himself such a friend in need. And time was passing.

" You're always very good to me, Mr. Brasse," she said timidly.

"Not at all," he returned with formal politeness, and, having saluted again, went on his own way toward the bridge.

When Sallie got back to the poop she found Reuben Yoxall awaiting her there and the canvas boat already afloat. The mate, however slow-witted, was smart enough in all his movements once he had made up his mind. He helped her over the side without any more words, and was soon driving the light boat along a straight, swift line for the landing-place.

Sallie's sense of direction enabled her to show him that, and also brought them safely across the bar into the lagoon where the other boats from the *Olive Branch* were lying empty, afloat. The third mate and some of the men had seemingly been left there in charge of them. Sallie caught sight of the former's sullen, furtive features in the sudden, foolhardy light of a match he was holding over the pipe whose bowl his hands hid. And there were shapes moving about him. She laid a shaky hand on one of Yoxall's, and the oar in his, dipping, shifted their course.

The boom of the breakers, behind them, killed all other sound. But she lifted a finger to her lips, and he proved sufficiently quick-witted then. Between them, they beached their own boat in the dark a couple of hundred yards nearer the camp, and waded ashore with it, and left it there, upside down on the sand.

The same magnetic instinct which had brought them safely across the bar to the beach led her almost straight to the mouth of the narrow ravine through which Captain Dove and she had reached the red-haired Emir's camp. And Reuben Yoxall followed her, blind, through the night.

"It was here that he was to meet us," she whispered

breathlessly, her heart in her mouth. They had met no one at all by the way, and there seemed to be no one there.

Yoxall scowled about him, unseeingly, and bit his lip, in helpless dissatisfaction with everybody and everything. Then he sniffed inquiringly, and in an instant all his relaxed muscles were taut again. A faint whiff of tobacco-smoke had reached his nostrils on the hot, humid night-air.

Sallie was aware of it too, and had snatched at his hand, to draw him on tiptoe toward the base of the great rock-wall that cropped up out of the sand there. They reached its shelter unseen and unheard as a harsh, suppressed voice spoke from round the corner, within the velvet-black mouth of the gorge. It was Hobson's, the second mate's.

"Put out that pipe," it ordered furiously, and was answered by a low, mocking laugh. There followed the sound of a smashing blow, and a short, sharp struggle that was interrupted by a muffled shout from high overhead. "Hobson ahoy!"

It was Captain Dove who had called cautiously down from the summit of the ridge at one side of the ravine, and the second mate panted a quick response.

"You can get a move on now," cried the old man above the roar of the surf. "The others will all be in position by the time you've pushed through. Open fire as soon as ever you sight the camp. D'ye hear?"

"Ay, ay, sir," answered the second mate, the habit of years still strong upon him, and went on to issue his own commands in the curt growl of custom. The fellow who had lighted a pipe in defiance of him was apparently quelled.

It seemed that he meant to leave some of his men to guard that end of the gorge. "And you'll keep a sharp look-out," he instructed them very threateningly. "If we're trapped

in this damned tunnel there will be all hell to pay — and you'll pay it!

" Move on now, in front. Feel your way with your bayonets. And don't fire so long as cold steel will serve."

The two listeners could hear the dull clink and shuffle of the advance. That soon died away. The men who had been left behind began a low, intermittent grumbling over their own hard lot; they did not believe for a moment that their comrades would share the loot fairly with them. Hobson was a coward at heart, said one, or why, otherwise, would they be wasting their time there? They were all smoking by then.

" The whole thing's a cinch," declared the same speaker more loudly. " I'll swear there isn't an Arab outside the ring-fence we've drawn round 'em, and — I'm going on along inside, to get what I want for myself. *I'm* not afraid of Mr. Blasted Hobson! "

He came out into the open and stood for a moment or two listening intently, within a few feet of where Sallie and Reuben Yoxall were crouching, their backs toward him. But the ceaseless crash and rumble of the breakers was all there was to be heard.

He turned back, and tramped off into the gorge, with two of the others for company. But three remained.

Sallie felt Reuben Yoxall tug at her sleeve and began to move softly away after him. From somewhere in the distance a shot suddenly rang out. More followed, in quick succession. The irregular crackle of independent rifle-fire soon made it clear that the concentric attack on the camp had begun. The three men in the mouth of the gorge were shouting excitedly to each other.

" We must get away back on board — at once," Yoxall

whispered peremptorily. "We can't search the whole Sahara, blind, for a man you wouldn't even know if you saw him. You've done all you can, Sallie. You've kept your promise. Come away, now."

She suppressed a hopeless sob with an effort. It seemed so inexpressibly hard that they should have gained nothing at all by the grave risk they were still running. But hope had failed her, too.

"We'll wait by the boat — just for a little, Rube," she begged none the less. "It may be that — "

"Come on, then," he urged again. "Let's get to the boat, — and, if you'll stay by it, I'll scout round a bit before we put off again."

"More this way," she directed him, as he moved on, impatient to get her back into at least comparative safety. And, under her guidance, they soon reached the rough, trodden path that led toward the lagoon where the boats were lying.

A hundred yards further on, he stopped her abruptly, and dropped to the ground, to set an anxious ear to it. He was up again in a second or two.

"There's a whole army coming this way," he declared in a tone of stricken dismay, "and horses with them too!

"We must make for the soft sand and lie down and burrow as deep as we can."

He turned toward the sea, one arm about her, and almost carried her across the deep, undulating drifts that clutched at her ankles like a dry quicksand. His own strength soon failed against them. He stumbled and fell on his face at the brink of a slope, and slipped on into its hollow and lay there, quite still. But he had let go his hold of her, so that she had not lost her feet: and she was soon cowering

beside him, face downward also. They had both heard the nearness of those other feet — very many of them — which had seemingly crossed from the pathway to intercept them.

A hoarse murmur was audible behind them. Some one had ordered a halt. They could hear the heavy breathing of men and the restless movements of horses hock-deep in the drift. They could almost see the ghostly shapes of the white-cloaked riders, but only the leader's horse was even very dimly discernible — because it also was white. Its bridle was jingling a little, too, as none of the others' were.

He uttered a short, sharp order, and Sallie set her teeth to choke back the cry of despair which had almost escaped her. For it was the Emir himself into whose hands they seemed fated to fall, and his tone told the temper he was in.

From among his horsemen a number of men on foot seemed to have emerged, and he was speaking to one of them, in English.

"Are you there, my fine doctor?" he asked evilly, and leaned from his saddle as though he could see through the dark.

"I'm here," a level voice replied, and Sallie covered her face with her hands in helpless horror.

"You're here, you say! And here you'll stay, say I — as was promised you," hissed the Emir. "'Tis not right that the likes of you should be still drawing breath — and her-you-know-of already cold. You're quick yet, and she's dead, my fine doctor — but yours is the funeral that comes first. And you're standing over your own grave now — hell's waiting for you beneath your feet. Stand to one side, and let my men dig down to it."

There was more movement about him, and then a quick shovelling of sand.

" If it's all the same to you, I'll tell them to help you in head first," said the Emir venomously. But the man in the scarlet mask answered nothing at all to that.

CHAPTER VI

HOBSON'S CHOICE

SALLIE had made an effort to rise, but her knees had utterly failed her, and Reuben Yoxall had laid a heavy arm across her shoulders. The ceaseless uproar from within the camp had suddenly increased.

The Emir was standing up in his stirrups to listen. He sank into his saddle again, and issued some further orders, in Arabic. Most of his force on foot in the rear made off at a staggering run. The horses of his body-guard began to paw and curvet to free their feet as the loose reins tightened on their necks.

"I must be going now, my fine doctor," said the Emir most reluctantly, "but I'll leave you company enough for the few minutes you've left, although you're but a dumb dog!

"And you'll maybe think of me when you're swallowing your first mouthful. Till then you can mourn her-you-know-of."

The white horse leaped and plunged as though he had rowelled it cruelly, and then he was gone at a breakneck gallop, the white shadows that were his body-guard hard at his heels, with lances free.

The grave-diggers paused in their digging as he disappeared. A dozen or more tongues broke into eager talking, and a fiendish, squealing laugh out-shrilled them all. Sallie,

with her face between her elbows, had thrust a finger into each ear, and her eyes were tightly closed.

She opened them a little, involuntarily, as the heavy arm that had been holding her down was taken away. Reuben Yoxall nudged her, and she looked round, with infinite caution.

A blue-light, like a corpse-candle in the distance, had suddenly flared up on the near ridge above the ravine that led to the camp. And in its ghastly glow an unforgettable picture was vaguely visible for a moment or two.

The last of the Emir's mounted men were streaming after him into the gorge, between whose open jaws lay three prone, trampled bodies, two very still, the other writhing round and round on the axis of a long lance.

The breakers on the beach beyond the intervening sand-waves reared up, and combed, and fell in blue-green foam. Outside them a black sea heaved ceaselessly.

Inland, a segment of the circular rock-rampart which enclosed the camp loomed up above the endless, empty desert, and on its summit showed a number of white-clad, crouching figures with rifles, all firing inward and downward on the pandemonium raging below.

Only a few yards away from where the two helpless onlookers lay the man in the scarlet mask was standing, his hands behind him, between the two big negroes Sallie had seen in the Emir's tent. And, grouped about them, staring at the blue-light with wide eyes, were a dozen or more armed Arabs. Two other negroes, knee-deep in a hole, were leaning on their spades.

Farther off, beside the lagoon where the boats were lying, the third mate and his men were making the best fight they might for their lives against overwhelming odds.

More than one of them had already fallen before the blue-light guttered away and that inferno was blotted out.

But the renewed darkness lasted only for a few seconds before the search-light on the bridge of the *Olive Branch* in the bight answered the signal from the ridge, cutting through the inky night a long, white, fan-like swathe which swept the coast in sections until it finally found its objective and settled there.

The group about the half-dug grave were at first almost paralysed with fear of that phenomenon. The two black eunuchs seized their prisoner and pulled him to the ground, the men of the guard took cover, with rifles ready, the grave-diggers dropped incontinently into the grave and cowered there.

But when, after its first gyrations, it steadied on to the ridge round the camp, leaving them quite unharmed and outside its focus, they fell to talking again, in awed whispers, while they gazed blinkingly at its effect, all but the two who were busy digging again.

Yoxall plucked at Sallie's sleeve. She crept after him, and by very slow degrees they got safely round in rear of the burial-party.

" Wait here," he breathed in her ear, and left her behind a low swell of the sand.

She crawled to its brink. He was wriggling back toward the shapes silhouetted against the dusky light. She clenched both her hands tightly over her lips as he reached the one that was lying motionless, a knee upraised, quite close to the others' heels.

The upraised knee slowly straightened. One of the two negro guards looked round and kicked at their prisoner. The other spoke, and a squealing laugh reached her ears.

Each instant seemed an eternity until she thought she could see Reuben Yoxall turn and begin to worm his way back toward her, with another stealthy shadow following him.

He reached her side.

" Up and run for it now, lass," he panted, and stooped and lifted her to her feet. " They can't hear us from there. For God's sake, don't give way now."

But she was quite limp and strengthless. The strain had been too much for her. He picked her up in his arms and made for their boat at an elephantine trot, the stranger struggling along after him through the sand. She was sobbing brokenly when he set her down beside it.

A piercing scream rang out across the sand from the near distance, above all the other turmoil. But he had already got the boat turned right side up and the man in the mask helped him to set it afloat. He splashed ashore again and carried Sallie out to it, settling her very tenderly in its stern.

" We're all right now," he told her, and she whispered back, " Oh! I'm so ashamed of myself, Rube, — I nearly fainted! "

The other man sat down in the bow and the mate stepped carefully in. A few minutes later they were beyond the bar, safe enough from pursuit.

" I'll take an oar now," the stranger suggested, speaking for the first time, and in a tone which showed how he had suffered. Yoxall passed him one willingly. He had overtaxed his own strength at last. He was almost exhausted before they at length ran alongside the *Olive Branch*, skirting the arc of the search-light. He could scarcely scramble up the rope he had left hanging from the poop.

But with the other man's help he managed to get the boat aboard and stowed away again. And they returned on deck together.

"What do you think has happened ashore, Rube?" asked Sallie very anxiously as he reappeared from below.

"I wish I knew, lass," he answered, no less concerned. "I'll go and find out what Brasse — "

"I must see Mr. Brasse too," she told him. "He's promised — " She turned to the stranger.

"The stokehold's the only place on board where you will be safe," she said, somewhat uncertainly. "Will you mind very much — "

"I'll shovel coal *most* contentedly," he assured her at once, in a tone that was still very tremulous. "And — how to show my gratitude to both of you, for the chance, I — I can't — "

His voice broke. He could say no more. His silent self-control had been too sorely tried.

"Come on, then," said Reuben Yoxall uncomfortably. And Sallie clutched at the big, stolid Englishman's arm again and clung to it as they went forward, along the dark empty decks.

On the bridge, in the dim, vaporous light at one side of the white hood within which the carbon was burning, they caught sight of the chief engineer, a raggedly disreputable-looking individual, with features haggard, refined to the pitch of foolishness, rendered still more fatuous by the single eye-glass he always affected and which he had worn even while, when he had first joined the ship, he himself had worked in the stokehold as one of the black gang who feed the furnaces. Brasse was one of a number of human enig-

mas who had followed Captain Dove's flag and fortunes for uncounted years, and Sallie had long ago heard the common report that there was a hangman's rope waiting for him somewhere ashore.

He looked round as she approached, and his perspiring face expressed heartfelt relief.

"Just a moment," he begged, and once more applied an eye to the telescope trained parallel with the light.

"I thought so," he exclaimed, and turned a tap on a tube leading into the hood. In the instant darkness which ensued, the flare of another blue-light on the ridge above the ravine ashore produced a very weird and startling effect.

The engineer turned to Sallie.

"Gad!" said he, hurriedly, "but I'm glad to see you safe back on board. I was afraid that — Did you get your man?"

"Yes, we brought him off. He's here, behind," Sallie answered briefly, since there was so little time to explain anything. "But — what has gone wrong ashore, Mr. Brasse?"

"That second signal should mean that Captain Dove has been quite successful," said Brasse, a bitter note in his voice. "I expect he'll be back on board presently, too. So I'll get away below now and send some of my men on deck to help. I'll have to see your friend fixed up before the boats arrive. Have you explained to him — "

"Yes, he understands," she assured him, and, as the stranger followed the engineer silently from the bridge, she spoke to Yoxall again. He was leaning over the rail behind her, gazing over the side.

"What do you think has really happened, Rube?"

she once more asked him. "It didn't look as if our men were winning."

"I wish I knew, lass," he repeated dully. "But — we'll know before very long, and — we can do nothing to help. So you'd better be off aft again, now, and seek some rest. I must see everything shipshape about the decks."

Sallie went slowly back to the poop, but she could not rest amid so many anxieties. It was not very long, however, before the regular plash of oars reached her ears where she was standing within the companion-hatch, under cover from the dew that the awning dripped. And in another minute Captain Dove's harsh voice hailed the ship.

"Show a light at the gangway, quick!" the old man shouted. "Muster all hands at the rails — and don't let a single son-of-a-gun on board you till I give the word."

These peremptory orders were promptly obeyed. Reuben Yoxall himself came running to the break of the poop with a deck-lamp and let the Jacob's-ladder down. But Captain Dove's boat was well ahead of the others, although for all company in it he had only Jasper Slyne and three white-robed Arabs, who, as they ran alongside, shipped their oars smartly to clutch at the ladder, up which Captain Dove scrambled swaying, with only one hand at his service. Slyne followed him, hot, dusty, dishevelled, still bleeding from a deep cut in one cheek, and then the Arabs, the Emir El Farish first, and the last with a turn of the boat's painter about his wrist in seaman-like fashion.

"Shift her forward now," Captain Dove commanded, "and up with the ladder again."

Which also was done, in a hurry, so that when the other boats arrived they had to bring-to under the bare wet side of the steamer wallowing in the swell. Sallie, herself unseen,

saw that there were only three or four men in each, and a sudden, sick understanding of Captain Dove's successful expedient for ridding the ship of the rest of the mutineers flashed through her mind. But she would not allow herself to surmise what the Emir's visit might mean.

Captain Dove, safe on board, surveyed for a space, in silence and very much at his leisure, the men in the boats. But not one of them was able or willing to meet his malevolent glance. A more cowed, unhappy, hang-dog lot he had never seen, and he told them so, at some length.

"Get on to your feet, you, Hobson," he snapped, and the second mate stood up in his place, as if with a galvanic effort of will. Captain Dove regarded him fixedly for some moments.

"You're the worst that's left," he said then, in a steely voice, "and — I don't quite know what to do with you. I've asked Far— the Emir here if he'll have you as a gift, along with the others I left ashore, but he won't. And I don't want you on the *Olive Branch;* there's no room on board for a man like you — you might stir up another mutiny! Seems to me the very best thing you can do for yourself now is to jump right overboard before I have that boat swung and lay hands on you. For, if you set foot on my ship again, I'll have you hove head-first into one of the furnaces. D'ye hear?

"But take your choice — one way or the other, it's all the same to me.

"The rest of you mutinous swine can come aboard now. You've had your lesson, I think, eh? Then stand by to pick Mr. Hobson up if he follows you, and carry him down to the stokehold.

"Let the ladder over again, there."

The doomed wretch, staring wide-eyed at Captain Dove in the lamplight, seemed to know that no appeal from that most monstrous penalty of his scarcely less monstrous crime would serve any purpose at all, and looked hopelessly about him while the others in the boat clambered, cringing, up the ship's side. He shuddered convulsively as he caught sight of a stealthy black fin in the water, within a few feet of him. His slack, twisted lips were moving like those of a man with paralysis.

"Put — put a bullet through me first," he begged piteously, and turning about, scrambled, groping, into the stern-sheets.

He stood there throughout an eternity of a few seconds, head bent, shoulders heaving, hands hanging limp, and then, "For God's own sake — " he cried, in a dreadful, whimpering voice, that was suddenly stilled by a whip-like explosive crack as he pitched forward, headlong, out of the boat.

Sallie had darted, unnoticed, down the steps from the poop to where Jasper Slyne was standing in the background, nonchalantly looking on.

"Save him, Jasper — for my sake!" she beseeched of him, who alone had any influence with the old man.

"I will — if you'll promise to marry me," he whispered in answer, as if inspired to snatch at even such a precarious chance of placing her under that obligation to him, and, without waiting for any reply, he fired at the black fin beyond the boat, ran to the rail and plunged over the ship's side. Captain Dove swung around, snarling viciously, and struck at him as he passed.

The splash he made frightened the swarming sharks away for a moment or two. He came up close beside Hob-

son, seized him by the scruff of the neck, and, after a desperate struggle, succeeded in clambering into the boat. A white streak seemed to leap from the water and snapped and missed the second mate's helpless heels by an inch or two as Slyne, with a final, frantic effort, jerked him inboard and fell backward over a thwart.

Captain Dove stood glaring about him, speechless. Sallie had drawn back, unseen, in breathless suspense. But the old man said nothing at all, not even when Slyne stepped, spent and dripping, over the rail, with Hobson close behind crying like a child.

"I've no more time to waste on such tomfoolery," said the Emir then, angrily, "and no great taste for it, either, Captain Dove. So give me the girl now, and I'll be gone."

"Come below, for a minute," returned Captain Dove, in a strangled voice, mastering his pent rage with a very visible effort. "Come below for a minute till I send for her.

"Mr. Yoxall, you'll let Mr. Brasse know that we'll be starting in half an hour. Tell those men off in two watches, and send one lot below. Leave Da Costa in charge of the deck — you'll be rated as second mate, now, Da Costa, d'ye hear? — and turn in, yourself, Mr. Yoxall, till the morning watch."

"Ay, ay, sir," Yoxall responded mechanically, and Captain Dove, as he led the way to his own quarters amidships — he had only been berthed aft, in the poop, while he had been ill and the crew conspiring against him — at length looked round at Slyne.

"Better get into some dry clothes, quick," he said, civilly enough, but in a tone which betrayed his real temper. "I want you to go aft and bring Sallie along."

When Slyne came aft again, a few minutes later, he was once more cool and clean and spruce in white drill, with a plaster over the cut on his face. He was also apparently well pleased with himself.

He found Sallie crouching within the companion-hatch, and she shrank still farther into its shelter as he approached.

"What's the matter?" he asked in surprise, his greedy eyes searching her white face in the misty darkness while she looked up at him in speechless dismay.

"Did you hear what Captain Dove said?" he asked, and laughed exultantly. "You needn't worry about anything of that sort now, my dear. You've got some one to look after you now, and — it's all part of his plan, don't you understand? You must come along with me, but — there's nothing to be afraid of. You're perfectly safe now — with me."

She did not know what to believe, but, since there was no help for it, she followed him, without a word, to the doorway of the mid-ship saloon, within which the Emir and Captain Dove were amicably engaged over a black bottle.

"The real potheen!" El Farish was saying exultantly, a tumbler to his hook-nose. "It's long since I've had the chance of such." He looked round as Slyne stepped in.

"Here, have a sip, Mr. Slyne," he said. "No, out of this glass of mine, if you please, just to show that it isn't hocussed. I've known Captain Brown — Captain Dove, I mean — long enough to be extra careful in his company."

He laughed as Slyne took the tumbler from him and, with a covert nod to Captain Dove, half emptied it at a draught. And, as Slyne smacked his lips, "If it does you so much good, it can't do me any harm," said the Emir

jovially. "So — here's to the pair of bright eyes that — Ah! there she is. Come in, acushla, and let's have another look at you."

But Sallie had stopped on the threshold, and stayed there, silent, unable to move. The Emir, staring avidly at her, rose and lifted his glass.

"Here's happy days and no regrets — to the two of us!" he cried, and was draining it off when Captain Dove, at his back, felled him to the floor with a well-aimed blow of the full water-bottle, which was the most convenient weapon at hand.

"Are his two cut-throats out there safe?" the old man hissed from between set teeth, and Sallie, looking round, saw two limp figures huddled with hanging heads in the dark alleyway just beyond the door.

"Safe as houses," Slyne answered evenly, since she stood silent, aghast. "I made sure of them before I went aft. A single drink settled their hash. You must have made the dose in the other bottle pretty strong."

"It's just as well, after all, you see, that we didn't depend on fixing him the same way," said Captain Dove, recovering his self-command and indicating the prone Emir with a contemptuous foot. He seemed to have forgotten for the moment his grudge against Slyne. "I was afraid he'd smell a rat if we tried that old trick on him.

"And now — the sooner he's over the side the better. Don't stand there staring, Sallie! Go and call some of the men in."

The girl turned and went, dazedly, drawing her skirts close as she passed the two huddled figures in the alleyway. Half a dozen of the watch on deck carried the Emir and his ineffectual retinue up the gangway, flung them, like

so much rubbish, into the boat out of which the hapless Hobson had fallen, and at once cast it loose.

"They'll probably all wake up before they drift into the surf," said Captain Dove, looking on, with a laugh which made even Slyne glance askance at him. "And, if not — it isn't my fault.

"That fellow thought he could get the better of *me*, Slyne — and there's the result!

"Is that you, Mr. Da Costa? Where's Hobson?"

"He's locked himself into his room, sir, and barricaded the door," the new second mate answered swiftly, with a servile smile.

"Humph!" exclaimed Captain Dove. "All right. Weigh anchor at once. Head west for an hour and then due north. You'll be relieved before long. And just bear in mind that we've got to be very careful of coal now; we've no more on board than will take us to Genoa."

Da Costa saluted briskly, and had disappeared before Captain Dove turned and caught sight of Sallie again.

"Get away aft and turn in at once," he called irritably to her. "You'll have to take the bridge by and by, and for a good long spell, too — we've all had a hard time of it ashore while you've been idling on board."

CHAPTER VII

THE WHITE BLACKBIRD

"I COULD do with a sleep myself!" said Slyne, as he followed the old man toward the mid-ship saloon after Sallie had gone.

"There's no hurry," Captain Dove disagreed. "And — we've Hobson to get rid of first. What the everlasting blazes made you bring him aboard again!"

Slyne darted a grimace of disgust at him.

"An idea of my own," he answered slowly.

"But — you're surely not going to murder him in his bed now!" he added. Case-hardened and unscrupulous though he might be, he had not yet got so far as to contemplate without a seasick qualm the idea of killing any man in cold blood.

He threw himself down on the settee in the malodorous little saloon.

"I'm tired to death of you and your butcher's methods!" said he, regardless of consequences. "Have you no conscience at all?"

Captain Dove, blinking balefully at him from out of weak, red-rimmed eyes, showed all his tobacco-stained fangs: but in an unexpected smile instead of a snarl. The old man was evidently in a much better temper now that he had turned the tables so neatly on nearly all of those who had thought him utterly in their power. It

seemed to amuse him to hear Jasper Slyne in the rôle of mentor.

"None at all," he answered amiably. "And — how about you?"

"You can leave me out of your reckoning after this," Slyne declared, the more morose since he knew very well what good grounds the other had for that taunt. "I'm going ashore just as soon as we get to Genoa, and you'll never set eyes on me again. I know when I've had enough — and I've had enough now."

"Not you," Captain Dove contradicted him blandly. "Say when." He had whisked a bottle of champagne out from a locker under the settee, knocked its wired head neatly off on the table-edge, and was pouring the creamy wine out into a glass, with hospitable but steady hand. When the glass was full he stopped, but not till then, since Slyne had said nothing.

He filled another for himself, and drank its contents off in a couple of gulps, produced a box of cigars, and lighted one clumsily. Slyne followed his example in both respects, but more deliberately, and the heady liquor was not without its prompt effect on him.

"What I mean, Dove," said he presently in that grandiose, patronising manner which always rubbed Captain Dove the wrong way, "what I mean is that I've had far more than enough of this rough-and-tumble work. It isn't the sort of sport at all that appeals to a gentleman. And, what's more, I haven't made a penny out of it all."

Captain Dove's eyes began to kindle. Slyne had succeeded, as usual, in touching him on the raw.

"No more have I," he asserted with a fierce oath. "I've barely enough left to pay the port-dues in Genoa and

take my ship through the canal; you know very well, too, that I won't be safe till I see Suez astern. For a few tons of coal and some temporary repairs I'll have to trust to my wits. I'm worse off now than I was when I picked you up in New York, with your precious scheme for making our fortunes in Central America."

The flagrant injustice of that reproach was so obvious that Slyne kept his self-control. "Whose fault was it that you were so soft with Sallie as to let her spoil all our plans?" he asked equably, and did not wait for an answer. "And you're far better off at the finish than I am," said he. "Your foolishness has cost us both our chance of a big haul — but *you've* still got her."

"I've still got her," the old man admitted, if grudgingly. "That's true. I've still got her. And she'll have to pay pretty high, perhaps, for all she's cost me of late. You wouldn't believe, Slyne, how well I've always treated that girl. I couldn't have done better by her if she had been my own daughter. And I wouldn't have believed she'd ever go back on me as she's done of late."

"You don't know how to handle her at all," Slyne asserted bluntly. "You're getting into your dotage. She's outgrown you. And what'll happen in the end will be that you'll lose her too. You're far too grasping."

Captain Dove shook his hoary head with a cunning grin. "If I don't know how to handle her, there's nothing you can teach me," he commented. "And yet you'd give your very eye-teeth for her!"

"It would be the best bit of business you've done for long," Slyne affirmed. "She's cost you far more already than you'll ever make again, and me, too, for that matter. Look what a hoodoo she's been to us all this trip. We might

both have been millionaires at this minute but for her interfering with — "

"Avast there, now!" the old man growled savagely. "Don't keep harping on that string, curse you! I know when I've had enough, too. So just keep your head shut about it. And bear in mind, Slyne, that what I say goes, on the *Olive Branch,* or — it'll maybe be 'Hobson's choice' for you too before we make Genoa."

Slyne gave him back glance for virulent glance, but kept silence, and showed his wisdom thereby. For Captain Dove, in that frame of mind, might very easily have been moved to some insane act of violence. The old man had never before gone so far as actually to threaten his casual accomplice. And even Slyne, who did not fear death itself, did not desire to die in a more unpleasant manner than need be. He sat quiet, searching his nimble brain for some more soothing speech.

"What makes me so hot," he explained, relaxing his scowl as he held out his empty glass, "is that I haven't the money you want for her. You've no idea, Dove, how well I could do with a wife like that. And now — "

"Sallie wouldn't whistle to your teachings now any more than she will to mine — not so well, in fact," Captain Dove declared, accepting the friendly hint, and reached for the bottle. "I wish to blazes that this lame flipper of mine was fit for duty again. See if you can find a fresh bottle below you, Slyne. And, for heaven's sake! talk sense. You haven't the money — and that's the end of the matter."

Slyne, searching under the settee, scowled to himself. He was not for a moment prepared to admit that the matter was at an end, but neither was he inclined to contradict

his companion again. It irked him to have to hold his tongue. He approached the subject afresh, from another direction.

"You may not find it so easy now as you think to dispose of her," he adventured. "The world's not so wide as it was, for one thing, and — she's developed a very strong will of her own these past few months."

"Tell me something I don't know," begged Captain Dove. "The world's become far too small to suit me — or you either, Slyne — but I know one or two quiet corners yet where the black flag's better known than the British, if that's what you're hinting at.

"Did you ever hear of the Pirate Isles, for instance? They're not what they used to be, of course, but there's still trade to be done in those waters, in spite of the French. I once met a Chinese mandarin there who offered me a hundred thousand taels for the girl — close on eighty-five thousand dollars. I'm going East again now, and I know where to lay my hands on him when I want to.

"A year ago I could have got rid of her to a son-of-a-gun from Shiraz who tried to do me down over a deal in rifles for Afghanistan, but I wouldn't let her go, to a scoundrel like that.

"The Rajah of — But, pshaw! I've had a round dozen of such offers for her, first and last, all good as government bonds — and a lot more than that like yours, Slyne."

Slyne almost choked over his champagne, but Captain Dove did not seem to notice that.

"And now I'll take the next — of the right sort — that comes along," the old man went on, growing gloomy again. "I've been too particular, I'll admit. I've picked and chosen for her, at my own expense, and always meaning to

see her as happily settled as might be. I couldn't have considered her more if she had been my own daughter."

Slyne pricked up his ears. "That's just where the trouble will come in for you," said he. "She's somebody's daughter, and some day she'll find out whose; she isn't by any means so simple as you suppose. Then there will be the devil to pay — out of empty pockets."

He hesitated over an impulse to argue the moral aspect of Captain Dove's expressed intention regarding the helpless girl, but concluded to let that go, since the pecuniary side of it was so much more to the point. "I wonder you don't see," he went on patiently, "how much better it would pay you in the long run to marry her to me, and so be done with all your worries. I'm bound to make money. With her to help me I'd soon be breaking the bank.

"I'm not close-fisted, either; I'm willing to share the profits with you as long as you've any use for them." He held up a protesting hand as Captain Dove would have cut in, no doubt with some caustic sarcasm. "What I'm offering you isn't eighty-five thousand dollars, remember," he finished, "but a free income for life, that'll run into six figures a year — or I'll be vastly surprised at your simple tastes!"

"You'd be more surprised if I said 'done' to any such idiot's bargain," opined Captain Dove, and laughed like an old hyena. "And the sooner you set all such nonsensical projects aside, the better we'll get on together. My pretty white blackbird will never have to fret her heart out in any imitation-gilt cage. And more than that, I heard her tell you not so long ago — I suppose you forgot that the open port below you was just at my ear — that she'd far rather beg in the gutter than marry you!"

Slyne flushed darkly under his tan and darted an ugly glance at his grinning tormentor. He had always plumed himself on his way with women, and Captain Dove's chance shaft had sorely wounded his very sensitive self-esteem. But he still controlled his own barbed tongue and said nothing of the new card he had up his sleeve.

"So be it, then," he agreed, with a somewhat difficult smile. "I can't force you" ("you old fool!" he added mentally) "to take the chance of a lifetime when it's offered you. And, of course, what you've told me now makes all the difference. You've often given me to understand that Sallie's a somebody by rights. Now you say she's only a slave!"

Captain Dove cogitated deeply, and then drank again. The *Olive Branch* was moving smoothly along her course, leaving a heavy load of trouble always a little further astern. A pleasant sense of security and comfort had replaced the agonizing mental strain of the past few days. The wine he had been imbibing was buoying him up, and he was inclined to be garrulous.

"I've often told you she ought to be at least a lady of title in her own right," he remarked at length, "she's so damned high and mighty with me at times. But — who she really is — I've never told you that, have I, Slyne?"

Slyne shook his head, with assumed unconcern.

"I've never told you that — because I don't know," the old man chuckled explosively.

"I don't suppose it's ever struck you that it might pay you to find out?" Slyne inquired with sardonic gravity, and Captain Dove began to show signs of becoming restless again.

"How the Seven Stars can I find out!" he demanded

indignantly. " The trader I bought her from, along with a shipload of niggers for the Sultan of El Merayeh, when she was very little more than knee-high to me — and a pretty stiff price I paid for her, too, let me tell you! — had brought her from the other side of the Back o' Beyond that lies three months away behind the mountains of God-knows-Where. So much I found out from him one way and another, although he could speak no language that I'd ever heard before. And no one will ever be able to find out more. She's my property, by right of purchase. It wouldn't pay even her own father, whoever he is, to try to take her away from me."

" But where was it you ran across her? " asked Slyne, with somewhat too much eagerness. " Oh, all right. You needn't tell me any more than you want to. I'm not in the least inquisitive."

He lighted another cigar, and lay back in his seat as if he took no further interest in that strange story. But in his fertile brain he was seeking some way to turn it to his own advantage. And the obstacles before him merely made him the more determined. For the needy adventurer's restless mind was inflamed by dreams of the future he might achieve with a wife such as Sallie to help him, by the delusion that, once she was legally his, he would succeed in bending or breaking her will to his every wish.

In the smoke that hung about the skylight of the squalid, grubby little saloon, with its two evil-smelling, untended kerosene lamps overwhelming even the odour of two rank cigars, he saw golden, diamond-set visions of such a career as could only end at the very crest of that dazzling society amid which crowns nod in friendly fashion to coronets, which will, on occasion, open its doors as if hospitably to a

man with money and brains and a tempting wife. Slyne had more than once in his palmier days strayed boldly over all boundaries into the outskirts of quite august circles, and felt assured that he was fitted to shine among even the most select.

While as for Sallie — he could imagine her at his side, tall and slender, in the very latest mode, but scarcely more than young girl yet, as lissom and shapely as any sculptor's divinest dream of Aphrodite, with her pure, proud, sensitive features faintly flushed under the scrutiny of the multitude to the complexion of a wild-rose at its prime; with her curved, crimson lips, drooped a little as though in appeal against the envious stare of the other women, questioning eyebrows, eyes with the wild wine of youth abrim behind their long, shadowy lashes, alive with strange, lambent lights, like twin rainbows born between sunshine and shower; and, over all, a glory of red-gold hair luridly aglow in the gleam of innumerable electroliers.

His own eyes hardened and narrowed again. A cockroach crawling along a beam had brought him back to crude matters of fact.

"Does she know — what you've told me?" he tried afresh, with unconquerable persistence.

Captain Dove shook his head abstractedly, and then sat up with a scowl, realising too late that he had admitted more than was maybe wise.

"It doesn't make any difference, of course," said Slyne, to appease him, "since there's so little to know: and she doesn't seem much interested, does she? The upshot is that she's your property; there isn't a court in the world that could say otherwise. And no other claimant could prove his case.

" If you'll take a tip from me, though, you'll see that she and Yoxall don't give you the slip together some fine—" He halted, tongue-tied under the old man's murderous glance.

" You can count him out," Captain Dove asserted, with a cold assurance which very much discomposed his more imaginative companion. " Is that bottle empty too? Then I'll just see to him now, before I turn in. I'm much obliged to you for reminding me."

He rose, still scowling, and set his lips to one of several speaking-tubes let into the bulkhead behind him. " Is that Mr. Brasse? " he demanded. " I want one of those boxes of cigars you have in the engine-room." He set one ear to the tube, nodded, and sat down again.

" You're not going to — do anything rash? " Slyne asked, uncomfortably.

" I'm not going to do anything that would upset an infant in arms — for more than a minute," returned Captain Dove in his mildest tone, and Slyne sprang to his feet with a startled oath as a hatch in the floor beyond the table at which they were sitting suddenly lifted, and in the opening appeared the bald head and stoop shoulders of the sullen chief engineer.

" It's all right. You needn't be nervous," said Captain Dove with a nasty grin. " There are lots of other funny little contrivances you know nothing about on this ship." And Slyne, looking angrily sheepish, returned to its pocket in his white coat something he had pulled out in a hurry, while his tormentor stooped and took gingerly from the engineer the innocent looking cigar box which that individual was holding out to him.

The hatch descended again, noiselessly, and they were once more alone.

"I don't like that infernal fellow," Slyne declared in a sulky voice, "and he doesn't like me — or you either, for that matter. If I were you I wouldn't turn my back on him when there's a hammer within his reach."

"Don't you worry about me," Captain Dove advised in return, and, holding the box to his ear, shook it slightly. "My head's quite as thick as your own — if it comes to hammer-work," he added, in a provoking tone. But that shot missed its mark. Slyne was very much more interested in the cigar box.

The old man set that down on the table, and, stooping, pulled off his shoes. "I don't want Da Costa to notice us," he explained, and Slyne, inspired by a fearful curiosity, followed his example.

Box in hand, but at arm's length, Captain Dove left the saloon, tiptoed laboriously up the steep stair which led, by way of the quarter-deck, to the chart-house behind the bridge, and, stepping out on to the deck with extreme precaution, passed aft into the darkness.

The night was no less obscure now that dawn was near, but he could have found his way about the ship blind, and Slyne crept closely after him, not knowing what to expect, since Reuben Yoxall lay safely locked in one of the rooms below.

Captain Dove stopped behind the canvas shaft of one of the wind-sails which had been spread to catch the scant breeze and relieve a little the atmosphere of the mid-ship cabins. Its base was made fast about the hood of an ordinary deck ventilator.

"Cast it loose for a minute and listen," he whispered to his companion, and Slyne obeyed.

He listened there for a time, and then turned to whisper excitedly to Captain Dove.

"There's something wrong with him," he said. "He's raving. He's down with fever, as sure's I live."

"Let me hear," the old man commanded, and was very soon satisfied.

"Hell!" he ejaculated. "Now, isn't that the limit! There's surely some hoodoo on board this ship.

"Tie it up again, Slyne. We needn't waste powder and shot on *him*. He's booked out, express, on a free pass — and a damned good riddance, too!"

Slyne was not slow in re-fastening the canvas to the ventilator again. But even then Captain Dove was not done with him.

"Hobson's in the next cabin," the old man remarked, "and we may as well give him his ticket now as later on. We can't afford to let him bolt ashore whenever we make port — and blow the gaff on us both, Slyne!"

Slyne hung back, his gorge up again.

"What are you going to do?" he demanded.

"You do your part and I'll do mine," snapped Captain Dove. And Slyne cast loose the second wind-chute.

Into the wide, rusted mouth of the ventilator Captain Dove cautiously thrust one end of the flat cigar box and pushed that well down its open throat. A muffled click was no more than audible but, none the less, caused Slyne to start apprehensively. And then the old man withdrew the box, tossed it over the ship's side, and, with a hurried whisper to Slyne to make the canvas fast again, scuttled off back to the saloon.

Slyne was not slow in following him, but stubbed his toes hurtfully on his way to the stair and could scarcely repress

the curse that rose to his lips. Just then, however, he caught sight of a shadow at the near end of the bridge above, which, he knew, was Da Costa, on watch, and he did not care to be detected in any such dangerous and undignified predicament. When he limped into the saloon below he found Captain Dove seated there, once more sucking at a cigar, head cocked on one side as if listening for something.

"Was it an explosive?" demanded Slyne, almost boiling over at the idea that he had unwittingly been risking his life as a cat's-paw.

"What the blazes are you talking about?" Captain Dove counter-questioned acidly. "And where have you been, eh? I thought you said you were going to bed."

He stared unwinkingly into the other's angry, suspicious eyes. "What's it like on deck?" he inquired. "Any sign of wind yet?"

"You ought to know, you've just been on deck," snapped Slyne.

"On deck!" exclaimed Captain Dove in surprise. "Not me. I've been sitting smoking here since you left the saloon."

Slyne, busy replacing his shoes, thought that over, and sat up again with a sneering laugh.

"Don't forget, Dove," said he, "that, if you ever go back on me at a pinch, that will be the worst day's work you've ever done for yourself. I'm the one who's been sitting here while you've been on deck — and I don't know yet what you went for."

"You'll hear presently," the other informed him, quite unmoved by his threat. "And don't *you* forget, Slyne, that, if you ever go back on me at a pinch, I've another —

box of cigars that I'm keeping for your benefit; I don't think Brasse will fail to look very carefully after it, either."

Slyne blanched a little, in spite of himself, and at that moment a stifled shout came from behind some closed door at the end of the alleyway outside the airless saloon. He moved, as if to rise, but sat still, rigid, his eyes dilated, as a blood-curdling, long-drawn cry reached his ears dully from the distance, and finally died to silence in a quavering agony.

Even Captain Dove was uncomfortably affected by it.

A shrill whistle made them both jump as the sight of a policeman just then might have done. It was the old man who first recovered his nerve.

"That's Da Costa, curse him!" he muttered, and darted a glance of contempt at Slyne as he crossed to the bridge speaking-tube.

"How the devil do I know!" he roared into that, after listening to what his new second mate had to say. "Yes, I heard it. You'd better send down and find out what it was."

He set the whistle into the tube again and turned to Slyne.

"Pull yourself together, you fool!" he said savagely. "This isn't the time to show the white feather. I wouldn't trust —" He stopped abruptly, hearing the sound of heavy feet in the passage as some of the watch on deck came tramping in, and Slyne, who had also heard that, pulled out his handkerchief to hide his tell-tale face.

The footsteps did not stop at the saloon door, however, but went on to the end of the alleyway. And, when Captain Dove at length looked out, one of the men there was

still knocking violently at the door of Hobson's room. But he could obtain no answer.

"Better get a hatchet and handspikes, Cassidy," said Captain Dove, "and break the door in. Something must have gone wrong inside."

The panelling soon began to splinter under these drastic measures. A crash told that it had succumbed, and then the two listeners heard the key being turned in the lock.

They strained their ears to catch what the men were muttering to each other. One jumped clumsily back into the passage with a hoarse bark of alarm, and, over the shuffling of feet which ensued, could be heard the soft thud of quick, desperate blows on some substance which muffled them, until one fell on woodwork again and a murmur of eager congratulations succeeded it.

The man Cassidy came along to the saloon door, out of breath but exultant. "Mr. Hobson's stone-dead, sir," said he, extending his hatchet, on whose flat blade lay, black and limp, a long thin snake that looked like a slimy shoe-string. "Mr. Hobson's stone-dead — and that's what killed him. It all but got me too, while I was turning over the blankets."

"Bring it nearer the light," Captain Dove directed, and then bent over it, frowning, while Slyne, at his shoulder, stared at it as if fascinated.

"Huh!" Captain Dove at length commented. "Your luck was certainly in, Cassidy, when you managed to dodge *that*. It must have got on board while we were alongside the wharf at the Rio. But my luck's out, since I've lost another man — and the ship so short-handed too!

"You might see if you can find a bottle of grog for those lads, Mr. Slyne. And — Cassidy. Just rouse the car-

penter out and tell him to tie a fire-bar or two to the body and slip it over the side. We can't keep a dead man on board till morning in weather like this."

Cassidy touched his forelock and went off, apparently quite content with the luck which had left him alive to enjoy his share of the bottle Slyne had handed him. Captain Dove shut the door behind him, and looked contemplatively round at Slyne. His own face was grey. The artificial animation derived from the alcohol he had imbibed was dying away. He looked very old and tired.

He slouched across to the speaking-tube and whistled up the engine-room, while Slyne sat watching him with sombre eyes.

"We've got black-water fever on board now, Brasse," he said in a weary voice. "Hobson's dead already, and the mate's down with it, too. I want you to send one of your men up to see after him. I can't spare a single deck-hand. And I must have some one — or Sallie will be wanting to nurse him herself."

He set his ear to the mouthpiece and, after he had waited a while, spoke into it again.

"That's good," he remarked. "Send him up to the mate's room right away. He'll have to stay there, in quarantine. And whatever he does know about doctoring will maybe help him to save his own life!"

CHAPTER VIII

UNMASKED

SALLIE sat up in her disordered cot with a start of alarm when Ambrizette came in to wake her, as she had directed before she lay down. She had scarcely slept at all amid dreadful dreams, and was still very weary, both body and mind. She had not yet had time to forget the horrors of over-night.

But she had no desire to dwell on them, and — there was the day's work awaiting her. Twenty minutes later she was on her way to the bridge, to relieve Da Costa.

That was not the first occasion, by many, on which she had had to fill a man's place. For Captain Dove had trained her to all the responsibilities of the sea. Da Costa touched his cap obsequiously to her and gave her the course, which she repeated after him, with mechanical precision.

As he turned to go, yawning wearily, " If you'll send and have me woke out again whenever you feel like it, Miss Sallie," he said with an ingratiating flourish, " I'll — "

" But Mr. Yoxall will be taking the next watch, won't he? " she asked, renewed doubt and distrust in her tired eyes.

The promoted Portuguese quartermaster shrugged his shoulders and spread out his hands.

" You and I must stand watch and watch for a little, Miss Sallie," he told her with a self-satisfied smirk. " The chief

mate is sick — of a fever. That Hobson he is already dead and over the side. And Captain Dove has sent order that he is not to be disturbed — unless necessary. He is broke down, he says, with illness and worry."

"Wait a minute, then, Mr. Da Costa," she said, so imperatively that he halted and let her pass. "I won't be long, and then I'll stay on duty till evening."

She hurried below by the stairway behind the charthouse, and went straight along the alleyway to Reuben Yoxall's room. She was very much alarmed; she knew how sudden and deadly the dreaded West African fever could be. She did not doubt that the wretched Hobson had fallen a victim to it.

All was quiet within the chief mate's room. She knocked gently, and the door was opened almost at once. A young man in an ill-fitting, coal-blackened suit of blue dungaree looked inquiringly out at her and then frowned.

"Keep to the other side of the passage, please," he requested crisply. "This room's in strict quarantine, and the risk of infection — "

"Oh, never mind about that," she broke in. "It's no worse for me than for you. And I must speak to Rube — Mr. Yoxall. Is he very bad? How did you — "

She had recognised him by his voice. Without his horrible mask he looked so much younger than she had supposed him that she had at first wondered who he could be, although his keen, resolute face was haggard and lined, his pale lips dreadfully drawn at the corners, and hideous remembrances still seemed to lurk behind his steady grey eyes.

"He's asleep at present — and pretty bad," said the stranger sorrowfully. "I had to give him an opiate. I

volunteered to look after him — which was the very least I could do. There was no one else who knew anything, and, although I'm not a doctor, I know some of the tricks of the trade.

"And I know enough," he added, "to warn you that you must please stay away from here in the meantime."

"I won't," said Sallie simply. "He's my best friend, Mr. — "

"Carthew's my name," the young man in the doorway informed her.

"He's my best friend, Mr. Carthew. And — you must let me help."

Mr. Carthew considered the matter, and nodded.

"All right," he agreed. "If you like to see to his food — what the ship's cook has left at the door will do him no good." And she listened attentively while he went on to tell her what would be best for the sick man.

"Ambrizette will prepare it and bring it along," she promised. "And — you'll let me see him next time I come down? "

"As soon as he's fit to see anyone," her new acquaintance assured her. And with that Sallie was quite content. She felt intuitively that she could trust him.

"Are you — all right, yourself? " she asked.

"Perfectly all right," he assured her. "And very glad of the chance to repay some small part of what I owe — our friend."

"No one else will come near you here," she said reflectively. "It may all be for the best in the end."

He nodded again, and, as she turned away, shut the door very quietly.

She hurried aft, to instruct Ambrizette as to the food

to be prepared and carried to the sick man's door, and no less hastily returned to the bridge. Da Costa left it by the other ladder; he evidently did not care to come too near her then. And there she remained all day, with only the sullen, silent man at the wheel for company.

Once during the afternoon she slipped down to ask how the mate was, and found him delirious. Slyne came on deck as she returned to her post, and frowned angrily as she told him, in answer to his quick question, where she had been. He had obviously intended to join her up there, but thought better of that.

" You mustn't go near him again, Sallie," he called to her peremptorily. " Captain Dove will be very ill-pleased."

" I can't help that," she answered, thankful so to escape Jasper Slyne's company. And he turned away with a still blacker frown. It was tiresome talking against the stiff head-wind.

The day dragged out its dreary length, until, late in the evening, Da Costa came on deck again.

" I'm good for all night now," he told Sallie from a safe distance. " Captain Dove's still sound asleep, although the mate's been making no end of a row."

" I'll be up again some time in the morning watch, then," she told him, and was soon knocking at the door of Yoxall's room.

Carthew's face was very grave when he looked out.

" Is he worse? " she asked breathlessly.

" Better — in one way," the young American answered. " He's conscious now. He's had some of the soup you sent along."

" Can I see him? " she begged.

" He's just been speaking of you. He told me to ask you not to come near him again."

She choked back a dry sob, and had pushed past him into the room before he could interfere.

" I'll sit with him for an hour or two now, while you get a sleep," she said, and stifled another sob as she saw how the sick man's sunken eyes grew glad at sight of her.

Nor did anything that the acting doctor could urge make any difference in her determination; and she hushed the mate's whispered protests with a brave smile.

" We're going to pull you through, Rube, between us," she whispered back, bending over him. " And you're going to obey orders for the present, instead of giving them. So don't say any more about it now."

She had seated herself on a camp-stool beside him. Carthew, convinced that it would be futile to argue any further with her, was evidently only too glad to stretch himself on the sofa and draw the curtains. And almost at once he fell fast asleep.

It was very nearly midnight before he moved and woke and sprang to his feet. And Sallie was still sitting there with one of the mate's huge hands between both of hers.

" He looks a little better, don't you think? " she asked wistfully before she tiptoed out of the room. And Carthew, after a prolonged glance at his patient, nodded approval and hope.

That night and the next day and the next again passed without any change of conditions on board. Captain Dove was still confined to his room, and would not even see Slyne, who had, therefore, to live alone, bored to the last limit,

not so much afraid of the fever as shirking any needless risk of infection, his intercourse with Sallie confined to an occasional shouted caution or inquiry.

Da Costa took the bridge by night and she by day. And every night she relieved Carthew for a few hours from his unremitting attendance on the sick man. She was with Reuben Yoxall when he died.

What passed between the two of them during that last vigil is not to be told. But the dead man's face was very calm and content when Sallie at length roused Carthew from his scanty rest to tell him that the appointed end had come.

"But you promised to call me up," he said, most unhappy for her.

"If there was any need," she corrected him gently. "But there was none. He knew — before I came in."

Her downcast eyes were dry, but grief almost beyond bearing showed in them as she looked up at him on her way to the door.

"You must get away to your own room now," he urged, "and have a long, quiet rest. Don't forget that you've done all you could — and far more than most folk would ever have dreamed of doing."

Her lips trembled a little. She held out a hand to him gratefully. She could not trust herself to speak. And, by and by, in her own quarters, she slowly cried herself to sleep.

Captain Dove was on the bridge next morning when she appeared, pale and worn. And he flew into a passion at sight of her, rating her very bitterly for her foolhardy behaviour.

"Go away back to bed," he finally ordered, "and keep

to the poop till I give you leave to come forward again, d'ye hear?"

Slyne, too, stepped hastily aside as she passed him on her way aft again, and called after her some anxious advice as to taking better care of herself. She was glad to think that she would be free of him for the next few days, for always in the back of her mind was the fear of what he had told her before still more urgent cares had come to overshadow that for a time — that he had got Captain Dove to agree to give her to him as his wife. And, now that Reuben Yoxall was gone, she felt utterly forlorn and friendless.

The *Olive Branch* bored through the Strait of Gibraltar during the night, and after that Captain Dove effected sundry surprising changes in his ship's appearance. No one would have recognised the rakish *Olive Branch* in the clumsy looking craft with three bare pole-masts and a smokestack as high as a factory chimney which went lurching, with propellers awash, across the Gulf of Lyons. Even its name had been changed again, and the new paint carefully aged. And a tattered Norwegian flag lay ready at hand in the box beside the stubby pole at its taffrail.

No further case of fever had occurred in the interval, but he left Sallie isolated in her own end of the ship until the lights of Genoa showed white and clear in the distance. She was on deck, late though it was, watching them as they grew always clearer, when Slyne came aft for a moment to tell her that she was once more free of the ship.

"And isn't it glorious to get back to civilisation again?" he exclaimed, real gladness in his voice and his smiling eyes. "Think of the good times we're going to have now, Sallie! I can't stop to tell you all I've planned, but —

I'll see you again very soon, eh? And meantime you can be getting ready to slip ashore with me early to-morrow. I thought these last few days would never end! I do believe I'd have jumped overboard but for you and the promise you made me."

He went off again, in a great hurry, before she could even deny having promised him anything. "Captain Dove wants me to fake up an old Bill of Health for him," he called back, and did not seem to hear her when she cried to him to wait.

Before she reached the quarter-deck, in her long oilskin coat, with a broad sou'wester to keep the dew from her hair, he had disappeared. And she did not care to follow him to the saloon below.

The steamer had stopped in the offing to pick up a pilot, and was already slinking in between the harbour headlights to the quarantine anchorage. As soon as its rusty cable roared through the hawse-pipe, Captain Dove came down from the bridge, and Sallie stepped out from among the shadows to confront him, on a quick impulse.

"Is it true that you told Jasper Slyne I would marry him?" she asked directly, without any preface.

The old man shrugged his shoulders crossly. "Don't worry me just now, girl!" he growled, but paused for a moment before passing on.

"Has he been pestering you too?" he demanded, as if aggrieved himself, "the bankrupt crook! Never mind him, Sallie. I'm going to kick him off the ship first thing to-morrow morning. He hasn't a cent to bless himself with, and — no man will ever marry you without money to burn, believe me."

Sallie drew a deep breath of belated relief. That load

at least had been lifted from her mind. She was at last free of the fear which had been growing day by day as the *Olive Branch* neared port.

A head and shoulders emerged from the engine-room skylight and she went that way. It was Brasse, the chief engineer, come up for a mouthful or two of fresh air. He nodded to Sallie.

"Your friend's all right," he told her in a low tone. "The old man left him alone in the mate's room till an hour ago and then told me to take him back to the stokehold. He's going to swim for it now. I must get a line let down — "

"I'll do that," she said swiftly, "there — between the two boats. Tell him where to look for it. And oh! Mr. Brasse — "

He would not wait to be thanked. "I'll send him up right away, then. The sooner he's over the side the better," said he, and so disappeared.

Sallie climbed the rail, and, having found a coil of rope within one of the two life-boats there, was letting that gently overside when another shadow joined her.

"How are you going to manage after you get ashore?" she asked hurriedly as she was making the rope fast.

"I have my own kit in this water-tight bundle," he told her. "I'll make for the steps below those bathing-houses on the breakwater. It's only a short swim."

"But afterwards? You'll need money."

"I have a little — enough to get along with, I assure you. I've nothing to worry about — if I could only think of some way to show you my gratitude. Is there anything at all I can do for you?"

She shook her head.

"You won't forget," he urged, grave again.

"Are you sure?" he insisted. "I don't want to presume, of course, but — Are you all right here, and quite happy? What sort of ship is this, anyhow? And how — "

"Listen, Mr. Carthew," she broke in. "The only thing you can do for me is to forget all about me and the *Olive Branch*. And I'd be very grateful to you if you would promise — "

"Not to forget you," he said. "I couldn't. But — all the rest I promise."

"Thank you," she returned simply. "And now — "

"There's no hurry," he declared. "We're quite safe in here. And — I'm not going to leave you until you agree that, if I can ever be of any service to you, you will let me know at once."

"Very well," she agreed, to save time. "I'll do that."

"You know my name," he reminded her, and paused, frowning.

"But — that won't suit either," he said to himself reflectively, "for more than a few weeks. And I'll be at your orders all my life.

"You see," he said, as if in apology, "I'm Justin Carthew just now, but — I'll be the Earl of Jura very soon after I get to England. And if you've ever any use for me then, all you need do will be to send word to the Earl of Jura, in London; it will soon find me, wherever I happen to be."

He laughed a little, and Sallie almost smiled too. But he had spoken quite seriously.

"You won't forget," he urged, grave again. "The Earl of Jura. I'm not joking, I assure you. And, some day I may be able — "

"I won't forget," she promised, no less gravely, and held out a hand, in her haste to get him safe away.

He lifted it to his lips before letting it go, and stifled a sigh, and, turning, let himself over the ship's side.

Sallie sighed too, as she reclimbed the rail after he was safely gone. She was wondering. . . .

But she was not left to her own reflections for long. Slyne came on deck, and had espied her before she could escape.

"I was just going aft to look for you," he told her in a confidential tone which she did not like at all. "How about to-morrow morning, Sallie?"

"I asked Captain Dove, Jasper," she answered in a low voice. "And he says — "

"But surely you're going to keep your promise to me!" Slyne exclaimed, in a tragic voice.

"How *can* I?" she asked, not thinking it worth while even now to deny that she had made him any promise at all. And at that moment Captain Dove emerged from the chart-house behind.

"A bargain's a bargain, Slyne," said he mockingly, having overheard. "And Sallie can't keep her promise to you because you can't come away with the ready cash. So you'd better say good-bye to her now, you won't have another chance."

CHAPTER IX

AN OVERDRAFT ON THE FUTURE

SLYNE had drawn back a step. One of his hands fell on the haft of a flogging-hammer that some one had left lying loose on the casemate there. Had it not been for the proximity of the pilot, drowsing away the time till morning in the chart-house behind, he would most assuredly have attempted to knock the old man on the head with it. He felt sure that, but for Captain Dove, he could have managed Sallie now that Yoxall was out of the way. He stood gnawing savagely at his lower lip as she vanished along the deck in the darkness. He had taken no notice at all of her timid good-bye.

Captain Dove grinned spitefully at him through the gloom of the small hours. "You'd better be off below and pack up," the old man suggested. "You'll be going ashore as soon as we get pratique."

"But — I'll be back. Give me time to turn!" Slyne snarled at him. "A bargain's a bargain, and — I'll be back."

"You'd better not," Captain Dove advised in a very ominous voice, and went on his way below, leaving Slyne to his own aggrieved, embittered reflections.

To Jasper Slyne the past few days had been like a foretaste of purgatory. Captain Dove had interdicted all communication with Sallie, and had proved a most un-

pleasant companion himself throughout the unspeakably wearisome passage from the North-west African coast, a passage made at the poorest speed of the ship because coal was scarce and he was afraid to call anywhere by the way to fill up his bunkers. Amid the dire squalor and discomfort, the enforced inaction and loneliness of life under such conditions, Slyne's only solace had been the hope of finally winning Sallie, by fair means or foul. He who, in his time, had met and made love to so many charming adventuresses, who would not have thought any more about her had she been one of their sort, had become absolutely obsessed by ambitions to be fulfilled with her for his wife.

And now — he knew that neither force nor finesse would avail him against Captain Dove's ultimatum. He had not the cash to meet the old man's demands, and that was apparently the end of the matter.

Most men, in Slyne's place, would have owned themselves beaten then. But not so he. Thinking it all over again, he would admit to himself no more than that he was for the moment baffled by contrary circumstances; circumstances such as had been his lot for so long that he could contemplate them almost unmoved. It was his happy creed that in the very face of failure itself one may, as often as not, discern the inspiriting features of final success. The dark hour that heralds dawn he spent pacing the cluttered quarter-deck of the *Olive Branch* in the cold, his far-away eyes always fixed on the twinkling dock-lights, his almost bloodless lips straight and compressed under his black moustache, cudgelling his brains for some safe means of immediately obtaining the money he wanted.

He had not the cash to meet Captain Dove's demands.

But neither was he so entirely penniless as Captain Dove supposed him. He had only a hundred dollars in hand, but he had twenty thousand francs at his credit in a French bank. Many a millionaire had risen to affluence from infinitely smaller beginnings.

But it would have been idle to offer Captain Dove any such trifling sum on account of the price he had set on Sallie. And, rack his own overworked wits as he would, Slyne could think of no safe plan for turning his modest capital over at a sufficient profit within the time at his disposal.

"The only possible way," he told himself finally, his teeth set, "the *only* possible way is to chance my luck at those cursèd tables again. Although, God knows that's a risk I'd give up anything else to avoid. But — it's the only possible way now," he repeated vexedly, recalling the very excellent reasons he had for never showing his face in Monte Carlo again.

For, only a season or two before, he had figured throughout the Côte d'Azur as accessory in an *affaire* with which the whole civilised world had afterwards rung, in spite of every effort to hush it up, an *affaire* whose tragic consequences had caused such a flutter of scandalised chagrin among the private police of three great European powers that he could never again cross their frontiers without fear. Since he knew very well that, if he were ever identified, he would deservedly disappear, without any further fuss, to spend the rest of his life as a nameless cypher, forgotten, among the living dead, entombed in some secure fortress. In that cosmopolitan underworld to which such as Slyne belong, occur many curious incidents not reported in the newspapers, and the citizens of

Cosmopolis have nowhere consul or minister to protect them against unfortunate consequences.

Slyne had no illusions as to what his fate would be if he were recognised on the Riviera.

" But she's worth the stake," he told himself with dogged determination, " even though it *is* life and liberty as well as my last few francs. And — I'd just as soon be done with things if I can't capture Sallie from that old scoundrel."

He knew very well, of course, that his prospect of making a financial success at the tables was no less of a forlorn hope. But he had all a professional gambler's blind faith in the goddess of chance. And since he would not withdraw from the contest, he had no option but to play that losing hazard also.

Day had broken before he had completed his plans. And then Captain Dove reappeared, sleepy-eyed and unshaven, to interview the port-doctor.

As soon as that functionary had glanced at the forged Bill of Health put before him and seen the crew mustered to the tally it told, the yellow flag at the fore was hauled down and Captain Dove hailed a shore-boat, to which he had Slyne's baggage transferred, and curtly told Slyne to be off ashore.

Nor did Slyne delay to bid him farewell. Each was heartily sick of the sight of the other, and each had plans of his own to promote in a hurry. They separated without so much as a nod. Sallie was invisible. And Slyne, in the boat on his way to the Custom-house, only looked back once at the ports of the poop-cabin, to see, within the dingy brass frame of one, a face that seemed to be watching him very thankfully as he went, a horrible face, with blubber lips, almost inhumanly ugly, the face of

Sallie's devoted attendant, the dumb black dwarf, Ambrizette.

A yawning Customs' searcher glanced at his baggage and passed it unopened. In return for which courtesy Slyne bestowed upon him a doubtful rix-dollar and a few words in fluent Italian concerning the *Olive Branch* — words which would not improve Captain Dove's prospects of an early departure from Genoa, but might, conversely, increase by a little his own scanty time-allowance in that desperate bout with fortune to which he had committed himself. He knew that Captain Dove was intent on coaling and sailing again without the loss of a minute that might be saved.

He had all his own movements mapped out in anticipation. He drove to an hotel at which he had stayed once before, and, after a Turkish bath and breakfast, went on to the Crédit Lyonnais office to cash his draft. Then he made a number of purchases in inconspicuous shops, where he had to spend a good deal of time in bargaining, looked in at the Motor-Car Mart & Exchange, where he saw a big touring-car over which he argued for some minutes with the salesman; and, after a belated but liberal lunch in a first-class restaurant, he turned back toward the sale-room.

A man in an elaborate chauffeur's uniform, and evidently English, stopped him in the street outside, to ask whether he would care to buy a gold cigarette-case, a bargain. Slyne looked him over, and sized him up at a glance.

"Stranded?" he asked, and the man nodded sulkily.

"Want a few days' work?"

The chauffeur's dissipated face brightened.

"Yes, sir," said he, "I do."

"Wait here, then," said Slyne, and went inside.

"Well," he asked the salesman, "have you thought it over? What's the last word?"

"Fifteen thousand *lire, milor* — not a *soldo* less," declared the dapper, frock-coated salesman, in a tone of final decision which Slyne's sharp ears judged unfeigned. "The car is worth twice as much. Indeed, I could not let it go at such a ruinous loss were it not — But, *ecco!* The owner himself. He would probably be very ill pleased to hear it was actually sold at that ridiculous price."

Slyne looked round at the grey-haired, portly, prosperous-looking individual threading his way through the agglomeration of cars in the background, and his half-parted lips snapped together again.

He wanted that particular car and had made up his mind to buy it, rash though such an investment might prove, but he had surmised from a lynx-like glance at the seller that he might be able to get it for even less than the salesman was authorised to accept. And, since his own pockets were so poorly lined for the expensive part he was playing, he, who despised chaffering, was yet bent on making the very best bargain he could.

"It's more than I've got about me," he told the salesman in a very audible voice, as the fat man in the fur coat halted indeterminately a few paces away. And at the words the new-comer's puffy face lighted up, as if with relief, behind the pince-nez he was wearing. He came forward and spoke.

"An Englishman, by Jove!" he remarked with a great semblance of geniality. "So am I. Very happy to meet you, sir. You're interested in my car?"

"Not at the price," Slyne returned, with an indifferent

hauteur which he judged likely to be effective with one in the stranger's presumable plight. And the fat man's lips drooped visibly, the pouches under his uneasy eyes became more marked. He was obviously disappointed, and felt himself snubbed. He did not seem quite sure what to say or do next.

Slyne, congratulating himself on his talent for character reading, turned away, to look at a cheap runabout, as carelessly as though he had all time at his disposal, instead of being, as he was, in a fever of ill-restrained impatience. The salesman figuratively washed his hands of them both; he could already foresee a forced sale at a calamitous sacrifice. And so it fell out.

Slyne, cavalier to the verge of rudeness, finally bought the big scarlet car, which the other almost forced upon him, for about half its market value, and paid for it there and then, in the new French notes which had almost been burning a hole in his pocket since he had left the Crédit Lyonnais office — so eager was he to be off on his last forlorn hope of winning Sallie.

"If you had allowed me only a few hours longer, I could have got you twice that amount," said the disappointed salesman in a stage aside to the seller as he counted over his own diminished commission. But the fat man merely bestowed on him a look of contemptuous annoyance, and, having signed the receipt Slyne required, tucked away in an empty pocket-book the balance of the crisply-rustling bills he had just received.

Even then he did not appear to know what next to do with himself. For, having glanced at his watch, he gave vent to a grunt of disgust, and hung on his heel undecidedly, after making a move to go.

"It's only about a hundred miles to Monaco, isn't it?" Slyne asked the salesman; and was answered in the affirmative.

The fat man gasped and choked for a moment, and then spoke again, with more confidence: a change due, perhaps, to the improvement in his finances.

"Pardon me, sir," said he, "but — if you're going that way, I wonder — It would be a most tremendous favour to me, and I haven't haggled over giving you the best of our bargain. The train's just gone, and — "

Slyne, chin in air, once more looked him over appraisingly, as he stammered and hesitated; and was very much disposed to cut him adrift without more ado. But some indefinable impulse, some feeling that here was a bird of a feather very sadly astray, caused him to alter his mind. "I'll be glad to give you a lift," he said, more graciously, "if you're ready to start now. But I can't wait."

The fat man's face lighted up again. "My luck's on the mend at last!" he declared. "I'm in as great a hurry as you can be, sir. I'm more than obliged to you for your courtesy. May I offer you my card?"

Slyne glanced at the slip of pasteboard conferred upon him while the car was being shifted out of the showroom into the street, where his elaborate chauffeur was in waiting. And, "Jump in, Mr. Jobling," he requested with unconcealed coldness as he himself took the wheel, relegating the chauffeur to a back seat. It ruffled his self-satisfied mood of the moment more than a little to learn that the fat man in the fur coat was in fact a London solicitor. With the law in any shape or form Jasper Slyne wanted nothing whatever to do, and especially at such a juncture. He was already repenting his ill-timed politeness.

However, he could not very well rid himself of his passenger then. All he could do was to dash through the busy streets of Genoa in the dusk at a pace calculated to make the hair of any respectable and self-respecting solicitor stand on end. But, out of the corner of one eye, he observed that Mr. Jobling was wearing a blandly contented smile.

That gentleman did not seem so well pleased, however, as they turned uphill into the Via Roma, and Slyne, understanding, relented a little again. "I have some baggage at the Isotta," he volunteered, and the cloud at once lifted from Mr. Jobling's brow.

Several assiduous porters stowed hastily in the tonneau, beside the ornamental chauffeur, the travel-worn trunks and suit-cases which Slyne had left there that morning, and stood at the salute till he drove away, when they no doubt returned to their lairs to count the profits of such politeness. He had, as usual, been very lavish with his small change. And his passenger was also impressed by his liberality.

Meanwhile the car was negotiating more carefully the lumpy patchwork with which the old Via Carlo Alberto is paved, and Mr. Jobling's puffy features spoke his discontent over its slow progress. But, once beyond Sampierdarena, clear of close traffic, on the open road to Savona, Slyne made more speed; and it was self-evident that he knew how to get the most out of his horse-power.

He looked, indeed, — if looks go for anything nowadays, — quite at home, very much in his element, lying lazily back in the driver's seat of the richly-appointed car which had been his companion's an hour before. It was late on a winter afternoon, and what wind there was had a chill in it, caught, no doubt, in crossing the Apennines. But

Slyne also was wearing a heavy fur coat and had pulled on a pair of gauntlets at the hotel.

As the car rocked and swayed on its rapid way through the last outskirts of Savona, he was humming light-heartedly to himself the antique aria of *The Man who Broke the Bank at Monte Carlo.*

"Been gambling a bit?" he presently asked his silent companion. And Mr. Jobling admitted the soft impeachment.

"And no luck," Slyne inferred amusedly. He could view with an equable eye the misfortunes of others as well as his own; especially since the stout solicitor's losses had brought his own way such a substantial profit as could be readily realised by the re-sale of his car.

"No luck at all," Mr. Jobling affirmed explosively, and the troubles fermenting in his mind at length found outlet in speech. "I wouldn't have believed anyone could have been so unlucky!" he declared with great bitterness; "and at such a critical moment. I want so little, too; I've no ambition to break the bank. It wasn't with any such foolish idea that *I* came to Monte Carlo. I wouldn't have had this happen for all the bank holds."

"Which isn't a great deal," commented Slyne. "I've broken the bank more than once myself, and lost twice as much the next evening."

"You play some system, perhaps?" his companion inquired, but Slyne shook his head reminiscently. "I've tried several myself, but none seemed to be of the slightest use. And now — It doesn't matter, of course. I didn't come to Monaco to make money; I'm not such a fool! But it's most infernally inconvenient . . . may cost me my chance of a fortune . . . practically within my grasp."

His voice had died away to a mere mutter. Slyne was smiling in disdain.

"But I can't go on losing at the tables for ever," he exploded again. "My turn must come. I feel in better fettle this evening — as if my luck had changed. It's no doubt since I met you; I must thank you again for this lift. If I'd had to wait in Genoa for the slow train, I might have got back too late to take the tide at the flood. I'm a great believer, you know, in striking while the iron's hot."

"So am I," said Slyne dryly, and much amused by his monologue.

"I'm sure my luck's on the mend," Mr. Jobling went on, growing still more communicative under encouragement, "and the mere matter of winning a few thousand francs is nothing to what will follow — what *must* follow. I've made up my mind to win all along the line; and there's a great deal in the theory that, if you apply sufficient will-power to any project, its success is assured. I'm ab-solutely *determined* to win fifty thousand francs to-night, and then . . . I fancy it was a mistake to come here at all. . . . But, of course, a man who never makes a mistake will never make anything. . . . I'll go straight back to London, and surely, among the five or six million people there. . . .

"*Look out!* Good — God!"

Between his two excited ejaculations Slyne had outwitted calamity. Taking a rash curve at top speed, he had come to an unexpected rectangle in the roadway running almost parallel there with the shore below, and, rounding that corner safely with a quick wrench of the wheel, had almost crashed into a heavy, high-built ox-wagon which was

backing blindly out from some steep, hidden side-lane. The hubs of the car's wheels had all but grazed the parapet of the roadway at Mr. Jobling's side, and Slyne, on the other, had barely escaped being brained by the timbers protruding from the rear of the wagon. The ornamental chauffeur was fast asleep in the tonneau behind.

Mr. Jobling lay back and gasped while Slyne held on as if nothing had happened, at the same breakneck pace. But neither spoke again for some time.

Through village after village they dashed, always at grave risk and yet without accident. The moon rose just before they reached Alassio. Slyne even managed to improve the pace a little then, and his passenger made no protest, but sat with eyes downcast, his lips always moving mutely.

"A slight overdraft on the future — it's no more than that," remarked Mr. Jobling a little later, as if he had been alone, and Slyne looked round at him for an instant, with nostrils curled in a faint, superior smile.

Slyne thought he could guess some part at least of the troubles afflicting his chance acquaintance, and was very little inclined to hear more about them. He was too busy considering his own plan of campaign, the blood in his own veins was running too briskly under the stimulus of that wild flight through the keen night air, to waste any time or thought on another man's worries. But — a fellow-feeling makes us wondrous kind. "Cheer up!" said he suddenly. "Every one overdraws more or less on his luck, at one time or another. If that's all you've done, it's nothing to mope about."

Mr. Jobling sat up with a start, and stared at him. "That's all," he asserted, a little too hurried in his as-

surance. "I give you my word, sir. . . ." And then he recollected himself and laughed uncomfortably, confused.

"I've been thinking aloud," said he. "But you mustn't take any notice of that. It's a bad habit of mine. And, as you say, we all overdraw on the future, from time to time. As a man of the world, sir, you'll understand what I mean to convey to you. And of course these little overdrafts are always met when they're due.

"What a fine night this is for a fast spin!"

"What's the nature of your present overdraft?" Slyne inquired perversely, safe in the certainty that the other could not resent that rudeness, and was again amused by Mr. Jobling's cough of discomfiture.

But, "Purely metaphorical," that gentleman countered cleverly. "We'll soon be in San Remo at this rate. I wouldn't wonder if we've established a record. It isn't every day there's such a car in the market."

"No, it isn't," Slyne agreed. "Nor a buyer for it." And conversation languished again.

But Slyne's spirits, none the less, were steadily rising as he drew nearer, mile by mile, to the chief temple of that goddess of chance to whom he looked to befriend him now — since it was not on his own behalf alone that he was seeking her shrine, since mischance must entail consequences so dire to Sallie as well as to him. The personal risk he was running lent added zest to the piquancy of his most unusual position as a champion of maidenhood in distress. And what Sallie's fate would be if his own luck failed him, he could picture in vivid detail from his own experience of a world most men know nothing about.

Within a few days the *Olive Branch*, with a supply of cheap coal and some makeshift repairs, would be gone from

Genoa, leaving behind no trace but such bills as Captain Dove could escape without paying. She would enter Port Said and leave Suez in some effective disguise and under another assumed name which would last her through the Straits of Bab-el-Mandeb; beyond which she would disappear, perhaps for good, into whatever strange world she might raise over the mysterious sea-rim which lies beyond " the Gate of the Place of Tears."

Captain Dove was an old man already. And even he could not for ever go on living such a life as he led. He had spoken of this trip East as his last, and it was his avowed object in it to turn Sallie to some account. Slyne, who, as you will perhaps suppose, was no squeamish moralist, sickened at thought of what time might still have in store for the girl.

" Just imagine *her*," said he to himself, " cooped up in some slat-eyed Chinaman's filthy *yamen* till she grows grey, or eating her heart out in some coffee-coloured sultan's clay palace, with nothing to comfort her but a crooked brass crown — and not even that by and by. It's damnable to think — But what's the use of thinking about it! I'm going to save her from all that — in spite of herself." And his selfishly sentimental mood of the moment once more gave place to a philosophic contentment with things as they were, and that in turn to an exhilarating anticipation of pleasures to come.

The lights of San Remo looked very alluring to him, who had for so long spent his nights at sea with no more companionable illuminant than a reeking kerosene lamp or the cold, aloof stars. He became jocular, in a lofty way, with the always impatient Jobling, and at the frontier was so patronisingly polite to the officials there that they

let him pass almost at once, under the apparent impression that he was some personage of importance — a circumstance which lent him a little additional self-confidence.

From Menton Garavan in to Monte Carlo is only some seven miles. And for that short distance he sat silent, once more mentally reviewing the manifold chances of mischance ahead of him. While Mr. Jobling, beside him, continued to mumble and mutter at intervals of misfortune — no fault of his own — and fortune, that marvellous fortune which was to be his so soon, since he had made up his mind that it must.

"I'm absolutely *determined*," said Mr. Jobling, unconsciously raising his voice again. "Eh? What? Oh, yes. I beg your pardon. I have a room at the Métropole. Where are you going to put up?"

"I always stay at the Paris," Slyne lied easily. He had no inclination for any more of his companion's society, especially while he had no idea how he himself might be received at any hotel in the Principality.

"I'll walk on from here, then, if you'll allow me," suggested that gentleman. "And — er — by the way, you won't be mentioning to anyone the circumstances — er — about the car."

"We'll let it be understood that I bought it in London — last month," said Slyne, ready to be obliging since it would be for his own benefit; and, cutting short with a curt "Good night" some further profuse expressions of gratitude on the part of his passenger, glad, indeed, to be so well quit of him, drove on in more state, his sleepy chauffeur in the seat vacated by Mr. Jobling, to make his next move in that desperate game in which he was going to stake life and liberty also on the infinitesimal chance of

returning triumphant to Genoa to claim Sallie from Captain Dove.

For, "If they spot me, I'll blow out my brains before they can lay hands on me," said he to himself as he drew up with an imperative *honk-honk-honk!* before the Hôtel de Paris.

CHAPTER X

THE GODDESS OF CHANCE

IF you have ever had to walk unconcernedly into the crowded vestibule of a fashionable hotel, not knowing at what moment you might be identified and arrested as a notorious criminal, you will no doubt understand, and, perhaps, sympathise with Slyne's state of mind as he entered the Hôtel de Paris. If not, you can at least imagine how he felt as he made his way through the throng toward the bureau, grimly conscious of every inquisitive glance.

There was little enough to shield him from immediate detection, beyond the flight of time and the facts that he had been wearing a beard and living under a French *alias* — or, as he would have preferred to put it, incognito — when, only a season or two before, he had earned such undesired and undesirable distinction throughout the Côte d'Azur. And he knew very well what his fate would be if he were recognised.

He was very devoutly thankful, therefore, when, having safely run the gauntlet of all those argus eyes which had seemed to be searching his by the way, he found himself installed in an ornate apartment vacated only that morning by a grand duke.

"I can't afford to do things by halves now!" he had reflected, shrugging his shoulders, as he had agreed with the manager, who happened to be on the spot, that the suite

in question would probably serve his turn. And even the manager had been impressed by his manner — and his fine car.

"So far, so good, then," said Slyne to himself with a somewhat nervous grimace, as he crossed to the window of his sitting-room and looked out over the moonlit bay, after tossing his keys to a valet with a curt order to lose no time. "And now — I must go on as I've begun. But — I can't help wishing I were well through with it all. I didn't half like the way that clerk watched me with his mouth wide open — and *I* knew *him* all right!"

No one could have appeared more care-free, however, than he when, an hour later, he left his dressing-room, ready to face — and outface — the detective talent he still must meet, and sauntered very much at his leisure, a cigarette between his tight lips, in the direction of the *table d'hôte*.

"Seems pretty dull here," he commented, after an indifferent inspection of the elaborate company there. "I've a good mind to go on to Ciro's — and find out if they have forgotten my face by now too. I won't have any peace of mind till I've been all round the old place." In pursuit of which bold policy he sent a page for his coat and hat, and stood displaying himself to the general public till they arrived.

He found Ciro's well filled, as usual, when he strolled in, taking with perfect outward calm the risk that he might be remembered there. But no hostile glance met his roving eye as he entered the restaurant. He was obsequiously received by an observant head-waiter, and shown to a table which suited his immediate needs to a nicety.

Among the more ebullient gathering in that gay resort

he could discover no cause for alarm. And no one took any special notice of him until, among some still later comers, he noticed a haggardly handsome woman, in a gown so scant that she might well have been glad of the great bunch of camellias she wore at her breast, who was pointing him out to one of the two men in her company.

Slyne's heart almost stopped beating at that, and one of his hands involuntarily slipped round to where, in a padded pocket within the arm-hole of his thin evening-coat, he had a little double-barrelled pistol concealed.

He caught the woman's eye again while she was whispering volubly to the attentive listener at her elbow, a fashionably foolish-looking young man of a stamp whose appearance is sometimes deceitful, and wondered sickly what was coming as that individual, having looked him over quite openly and with the aid of an eye-glass, rose and approached him across the room.

He glanced up in admirably assumed surprise, however, for all answer to the other's gruffly casual, " Good evenin', sir.

" Will you excuse my askin' whether you'd care to sell the car I saw you drivin' past in, an hour ago? " inquired the stranger, quite unabashed. " Because — I want it, don't y'know."

Slyne's face remained an immobile mask, although in his heart he was dully conscious of an almost overwhelming sense of relief.

" It isn't for sale at the moment," he answered, suavely enough, but as if a little offended.

" But — I want it," reiterated the stranger, who did not seem to lack a sufficient sense of his own importance. " And I'll give you practically your own price for it. It's

for a lady, don't y'know — and as a favour to me, eh? "

" I'd be very glad to oblige you," said Slyne, elated beyond expression to find not only that his fears had been groundless, that his visitor was really a fool and not a knave in disguise, but also that, if he played his own cards properly, he might pocket a still fatter profit upon his car than he had anticipated, " but — I can't at the moment. Are you going to be here for a few days? "

" I'm at the Cap Martin for a week. As soon as you change your mind you can come over an' see me there. Ask for Lord Ingoldsby. Good evenin' to you," answered his visitor with all the sulky insolence of a spoiled child; and slouched back to his own table, where, Slyne had the satisfaction of seeing, he had to endure a rating from his enchantress for his ill-success on her errand. And Slyne almost smiled.

For he knew the Marquis of Ingoldsby quite well, by repute at least, as an English pigeon with feathers well worth the plucking, and set the other two down for what they were, a pair of those hawks to be found hovering wherever the simple pigeon would try its wings. He became contemplatively interested in the trio, although he knew the ways of that wicked world far too well to suppose for an instant that he would be allowed to make a quartette of it.

" But you shall have your car, madame," he soliloquised, " presently, when I'm finished with it. And, in exchange, I'll take — "

" If only I had Sallie here now — " he said to himself with sudden self-pity, and then was seized with a hot contempt for all such as the noble marquis. " But no one under a

royalty need hope for an introduction to her then," he finished, and so stifled an inconvenient twinge of conscience.

"In the meantime it looks to me as if *my* little overdraft on the future is going to pay me most handsomely," he reflected. And that happy thought added zest to his appetite for the excellent dinner his waiter had ordered for him, the first good dinner to which he had sat down in endless months.

He had given the man *carte blanche* in the matter of viands, only reserving the choice of what he should drink. So that when he ordered Vichy the waiter was not unduly depressed. Slyne also would have preferred to see a silver bucket beside the table, a pursy gold neck protruding from it, but he wanted all his wits about him that evening, while he was once more pitting himself, alone, against all comers in Monte Carlo — and, incidentally, against the odds in favour of the bank, on which he hoped to draw to the tune of at least a hundred thousand dollars during the next few days. He knew, of expensive experience, that the Widow Clicquot and her charming companions are safer society after a dangerous campaign is over than just before it begins.

He would not even venture upon an after-dinner cigar, contenting himself with a cigarette from the plain gold case with a crest on it which he purchased from the chauffeur he had so providentially picked up in Genoa that afternoon. But he tipped the waiter with such profusion that the man preceded him to the door bent almost double with gratitude, and even the Marquis of Ingoldsby was staringly impressed by the magnificence of his exit — as Slyne had intended he should be.

His masterly impersonation of an unostentatious millionaire was not without its effect on the flunkeys of the Casino also. These made as much of his entrance as he in his assumed modesty would allow on his way into the *salles de jeu*, where he attracted not a few appraising, inquisitive glances while he once more dared discovery as he roamed from table to table, gazing about him as though that had really been his first visit there. The world and the half-world alike seemed to be wondering who he might be; a circumstance which, otherwise, would have caused him ecstatic pleasure.

It has been stated already that he was more than passably good-looking, with regular profile and straight, spare, elegant figure. In evening clothes which fitted him to perfection, neither over-groomed nor untidy in any detail, without a flaw for the most fastidious to pick in either appearance or manner, he seemed to bear some stamp of distinction which might very well have passed current in circles much more exclusive.

The rooms were well filled, although the really fashionable world had just begun to flock south for the winter. The usual motley went to make up the highly-coloured mosaic of worshippers at the chief shrine of the goddess of chance. It would be a waste of your time and mine, too, to describe again the types to be observed there, and Slyne had seen them all very often before. He sauntered about for a little and then slipped quietly into the only seat which had been vacated since he had arrived, much to the annoyance of a short, fat Frenchman who seemed disposed to insist on his own prior claim to it, till Slyne glanced over one shoulder into his eyes.

" Good luck to you! " cried a jovial voice from the other

side of the table as he sat down, and Slyne nodded coldly to his companion of the afternoon.

He did not desire Mr. Jobling's further acquaintance, and would have ignored his greeting entirely but that he had noticed in front of the stout solicitor quite a noteworthy stack of winnings; and he did not know whether he might not yet have occasion to draw on the other's expressed ambition to repay him a favour done. In any case, he dismissed all such ideas from his mind for the moment, and started to play, very cautiously.

A cautious player, who can keep his head, need seldom lose a great deal at any game. Slyne had drunk nothing stronger than Vichy since the night before. He was tensely on the alert. His luck came and went until he had lost a couple of thousand francs, and then he began to win.

He had been winning, slowly but surely, with only an occasional set-back, for over an hour before he became aware that a growing group of interested onlookers had gathered behind him, and that he had accumulated within the space between his protective elbows a pile of notes and gold which reached to his chin. And, thus convinced that he was in the vein, spurred on by some sudden remembrance of Sallie caged in her cabin on the *Olive Branch*, an ever-present temptation to play to the gallery, to stake no less than the maximum on every turn of the wheel, had almost vanquished all his discretion when he encountered the quiet glance of a man who was contemplating him from behind the players seated at the other side of the table, a man whom he knew only too well as one of the cleverest of those *mouchards* whose frequent comings and goings attract so little attention there, and who knew him.

The brilliant lights about him grew strangely blurred.

He felt faint and ill. But, by a desperate effort of will, he managed to maintain an outward composure. He yawned openly, and then let his eyes fall to look at his watch. The detective was carelessly moving round the table in his direction. He shifted his rake to his left hand and, slipping his right across his chest to within the lapel of his evening-coat, laid out some small further stake, entirely at random.

He lost that, and two or three more, before he yawned again, as if fatigued by such trifling, and pushed a much larger amount into place, as a blind man might, for a final venture. No hand had as yet fallen on his shoulder, but the suspense of not knowing at what moment that would happen was hard to bear. He felt like one in the grip of a hideous nightmare as the croupier presently shovelled over toward him a large and miscellaneous assortment of notes and gold and counters, which, none the less, he collected indifferently and dully conscious of an envious sigh from behind him.

He hesitated a little before letting go his hold of the pistol about whose butt the fingers of his right hand were still closely clasped, in order to pocket his profits of the evening. He had laid down his rake. It was at once seized by a woman who had been standing close at his shoulder, and, as she pushed eagerly past him into his seat, the bunch of camellias in her corsage brushed his face. It was the woman with whom Lord Ingoldsby had been dining. Slyne noticed her husband among the crowd in the rear as he himself made his way out into the open. He noticed also, approaching him entirely as if by accident, the inconspicuous spy whose appearance there had so alarmed him.

Slyne had not even time to hesitate. Without the slightest change of expression he stopped and confronted his

enemy, addressing him by name, in the execrable French of the average Englishman.

"*Bon soir, M. Dubois. Comment ça va? Bien,* eh?"

"Monsieur has the advantage of me," the detective returned in effortless English, and over his features flitted the faintest shadow of disappointment.

"Oh, I scarcely supposed you would know me," said Slyne with a deprecatory shrug. "This is my first trip so far afield, though I've seen you several times in Paris, and we all know you quite well in London, of course."

The faintest shadow of what might have developed into a smile hovered for an instant about the famous man-hunter's lips and eyes, and Slyne made a mental note of the fact that he was not above being flattered.

"I'm over here after a fat fellow called Jobling," continued Slyne, ingratiatingly communicative. "I don't suppose you know anything about him?"

The other sniffed, disdainfully.

"An embryo embezzler," said he, in a tone of such conscious superiority that Slyne would surely have laughed in his face if he himself had felt safe. "Give him rope enough and he'll do the rest. Don't disclose yourself for a day or two, but watch him carefully.

"Are you working for New Scotland Yard?"

Slyne had expected some such question, and did not stammer over his answer.

"I've started a private agency on my own account. This is my first case. A thousand thanks for your hint. If all my official friends were as courteous, life would be much pleasanter for me." He spoke with a most respectful inflection, but always in barbarous Anglo-French. "*Mille remercîments encore, mon confrère. Et maintenant — à demain.*"

His new acquaintance nodded with most gracious condescension and moved on in the direction of an obese German diplomatist who had just met amid the throng and greeted with over-acted surprise a pretty Viennese countess. And Slyne did not fail to observe, amid all his own agitation, how promptly the two of them parted again at sight of M. Dubois.

He was conscious that his own nostrils were nervously twitching, and that there were tiny beads of cold perspiration about his forehead.

"He thought he knew me," said he to himself, very tremulously. "And, though I've put him off the scent to some extent, he'll root about till — " For all his nerve of steel, he shivered and changed countenance.

"I can't trust myself to play any more to-night — and just when I was getting my hand in! But I suppose I may thank my stars that I'm no worse off since I caught his eye — he'd have been down on me in an instant, if I had so much as blinked. And now I must bluff him out — I'm *not* going to be scared off.

"There's this about it, anyhow — if I've really got him hoodwinked, none of the others need worry me!" With which conditional self-encouragement, and having made sure that his enemy was no longer watching him, he turned back on an impulse, to see how Mr. Jobling was getting on. But Mr. Jobling had already gone off with his winnings.

"I wonder if he'd take a hand at écarté now?" thought Slyne. "His name came in very useful just now — and I might as well have my own money back out of him while he's got it. He'll probably be fancying himself at the moment, too."

And with that business-like ambition before him, he

roamed the rooms till he could be sure that his proposed victim was nowhere within the Casino. Among the multitude there he could run across no one else who seemed likely to prove easy prey. So he gave up the quest with a philosophical shrug, got his coat and hat, and sauntered out on to the terrace, a fragrant cigar between his thin lips.

"And I'll stand myself a bottle of something at supper, to buck me up," he promised himself. "I'll look into Ciro's again presently, and get the good of the gold piece I had to waste on that scoundrelly waiter. If I chance across Jobling there, I'll get a free meal as well; or, if I should see that ass Ingoldsby, I'll tackle him while his precious keepers are out of the way. They're evidently making *his* feathers fly!"

The night was still, and even unusually mild for that season of the year. The moon had disappeared. Slyne looked down at the sea, all dark and mysterious, with a strong feeling of distaste; he had lately seen more than enough of it to last him a lifetime. He turned his steps toward the deserted gardens, to escape a party of chattering tourists who had trespassed on his privacy.

He was in no hurry at all for supper, and wanted a few minutes of peace and quietness in which to compose his still troubled mind, and to consider the situation as touching his lordship of Ingoldsby — who would undoubtedly prove a far more profitable companion than Mr. Jobling, even although the latter should have won the fifty thousand francs that had been his ambition.

"What a fool that fellow is, for a lawyer!" mused Slyne, having more or less successfully combated an inclination to let his thoughts stray back to the *Olive Branch* — and Sallie. And, *Click!* something answered him from behind

a bush not very far from the verge of the path he was meditatively pacing.

He jumped aside at the sound, as any man would who has known what it is to be ambushed, and then, recollecting himself, stood still, with a mirthless, annoyed half-smile. He did not believe that Dubois would adopt any such noisy means to get rid of him, but — none the less, he felt impelled to find out who was in hiding behind that bush.

CHAPTER XI

A FOOL AND HIS FORTUNE

SLYNE skirted a flower-bed cautiously and, approaching the shadowy background by a flank movement, found a stout individual in a voluminous coat kneeling on the grass there, with some white, metallic object in one trembling hand lifted in the direction of his own left eyelid. A second *Click!* startled Slyne disproportionately, and he spoke at that, in a very querulous voice. "Hey! you fool," he said, "you're wasting your time. Wait till I show you how.

"Good Lord! is that *you*, Jobling?"

Mr. Jobling suddenly cast a revolver from him, with a wailing execration, and, attempting to rise, sank down beside it, blubbering, entirely unstrung after the agonising strain of the past few seconds. Slyne, eyeing him with exasperated contempt, picked the weapon up and fingered it for an instant.

"A damned rotten make!" he commented morosely. "But it'll do the job for you all right now. You can't shoot it off, you know, with the safety catch set."

The miserable man on the grass held out his hand for it, humbly. But Slyne was not at all prepared to take any risks on his account — for suicide and murder are often very difficult to distinguish, in their results — and made up his mind to keep it, in the meantime at any rate.

" Get up," he ordered in his sharpest tone, " and come away out of this. If you could only see yourself, you wouldn't want to sit there and whimper."

Under the spur of that insult Mr. Jobling seemed to recall some stray shred of his forfeited self-respect. He got on to his knees, with an effort, and thence by degrees to his feet.

" I think you might show a little more decent feeling," he sobbed brokenly, " when — "

" And I think you might show a vast deal more sense," snapped Slyne. " Button up your coat, and come away out of this. You can kill yourself just as easily — a good deal more so, in fact, since I've shown you how — in half an hour, after I'm in a safer position to prove an *alibi* if any inconvenient questions are asked about it afterwards. Come on, now."

His whilom acquaintance followed him meekly, muttering, to a secluded corner where there was a seat.

" What's the trouble? " demanded Slyne magisterially, sitting down at one end of the bench and motioning him to the other. " But I suppose I need scarcely ask. Trust funds mysteriously melted away — the usual childish attempt to recover them by sheer chance, and with all the odds against you! — the dread of exposure and disgrace — which never worry a dead man. You've been a bit of a wolf in sheep's clothing, eh, my respectable friend? And you'd rather die in the dark than face the world in broad daylight without your immaculate fleece."

Mr. Jobling groaned.

" But why, after all, finish playing the knave by playing the fool? If you were the man of the world you fancy yourself, you'd know that sheep are very seldom successful in real life. It's all very well to pose in a sheep-skin, but it isn't

everything. A wolf undisguised can do very well for himself, so long as his teeth are sufficiently sharp. And, when he becomes a big millionaire, he can buy himself, among other things, a nice new merino coat."

His parable amused himself, but his auditor did not seem possessed of a sufficient sense of humour to appreciate its personal application.

"You're labouring under a misapprehension," said that gentleman, who had meantime regained some grip on himself, in accents anything but properly grateful. "I may, perhaps, have been unfortunate with — er — a few small investments for clients, but your inference that I have — er — er — You're positively insulting, sir!"

Slyne laughed, in better humour. "Bah!" said he. "What's the use of bluffing? You weren't going to blow out your brains — if any — because you had been too honest, were you?"

"I'm a desperate man," declared Mr. Jobling, thus rudely reminded of the matter in hand. "Life isn't worth living, now that I've lost — " He gulped and gasped, once more on the verge of tears, but a furtive glance at Slyne's impassive features, dimly visible in the glow of a half-smoked cigar, showed him he need not expect any excess of sympathy from that quarter. It also seemed to suggest to him, in the midst of his anguish of mind, an idea. He looked round at Slyne again.

"You're a man of wealth," he said in a husky voice whose suddenly inspired eagerness he could not conceal, and some spark of hope perhaps sprang up in his fainting heart again since Slyne did not deny that erroneous suggestion. Slyne was waiting to hear what more he might have to say, though not with any intention of helping him.

"I wonder — " the stout solicitor muttered. "It might interest you to — Two heads are better than one, and — Some sort of partnership — "

"I can only spare you five minutes more," said Slyne crisply. "As soon as I've finished my cigar, I'm going across to Ciro's for supper. The Marquis of Ingoldsby is expecting me."

"Do you know his lordship? " breathed Mr. Jobling, his new-born hope no doubt gaining strength and his respect for his chance companion obviously increased. "Then you'll understand me when I tell you that I've ruined myself — ab-so-lutely *ruined* myself over the Jura succession."

"I haven't the least idea what the devil you're talking about," said Slyne.

Mr. Jobling groaned again. He was most grievously disappointed.

"I thought every one had heard of the case," he went on. "A couple of millions in cash — "

"Millions of what? " demanded Slyne with a little more lively interest.

"Pounds sterling," the London lawyer explained, rather testily. "A couple of millions in cash and forty or fifty thousand a year going a-begging may not seem a very important matter to a moneyed man like you, but I've thought of nothing else, night and day, for the past five years, and — "

"I've been all over the world for the past five years," mentioned Slyne loftily, but impatient now, "and the latest news of the parish pump has probably failed to reach me. Get on with your story, anyhow. If there's anything in it — I don't know but that I may be disposed to lend you a hand — if there's anything in it." And, having lighted a

fresh cigar, he composed himself to listen. His time was his own. The chance of catching Lord Ingoldsby alone at Ciro's was too remote to be worth more than the passing thought. A story with so much money in it might prove at least as entertaining as a solitary supper.

Mr. Jobling gazed with glistening eyes at his providential acquaintance. "I've told you what there is in it," said he in a tremulous tone. "A couple of millions in cash and forty or fifty thousand a year that will all ultimately fall to the Crown — unless I can find that girl, or — "

"What girl?" Slyne demanded irritably.

"The late Earl of Jura's daughter. You'll no doubt remember — But if you've been abroad for so long, I'd better repeat — " And, having got over his nervous prolixity, he became much more explicit.

"The late earl's first wife, as you must recall, sir, was Lady Eulalie Orlebarre. But she did not survive the birth of their only child, a son, in 1876.

"The earl married again, in '94. His second wife was Josceline Beljambes, the famous dancer. A daughter was born to them. But they separated, by mutual agreement, only a year or two later, and the countess retained custody of her daughter. The earl was a good deal older than she.

"She was a very restless, erratic woman, and fond of travel. In '99 she disappeared most mysteriously, somewhere abroad, and has never been heard of since.

"The following year, Lord St. Just, the earl's son by his first wife and, of course, his heir, was found dead one day at the foot of the cliffs near Loquhariot, the family seat in Scotland. He had grown up a very headstrong, troublesome lad, I have heard. There was some suspicion of foul play on the part of one of the gamekeepers on the estate

— some scandalous story about a girl in the village — but the coroner's jury returned an open verdict.

" The earl himself died in 1906, a little more than five years ago. The estates fell into Chancery. And ever since I've been trying to trace his second wife — or their child; for, failing an heir-male, the female line of succession maintains in the family.

" The Court of Chancery is quite prepared to presume the mother dead, and I have evidence sufficient to prove that assumption a certainty. So that now, you see, if I could only find — "

He hesitated, to scrutinise his companion's inscrutable face.

" I was a consummate fool, of course, ever to have come to Monte Carlo," he went off at a tangent. " Though I had a good enough reason for coming," he went on, defending himself to himself. " I didn't dare trust anyone in London. And I — I thought that I might find here — " He balked again.

" It was merely to pass the time that I first tried my luck at the tables — and look at me now! I haven't even money to pay my hotel bill. For want of a few thousand francs I must lose my chance of the fortune on which I've staked every penny I could scrape together and — and five years of my good time, and — " He started to one side as Slyne cut him short.

" I'm not going to waste five seconds of *my* good time," said Slyne with concentrated bitterness, " in telling you how many different sorts of a damned fool you are." His expensive cigar had gone out, unheeded. But his keen, close-set eyes were aglow. He was finding it extremely difficult to contain himself.

" Are you *sure* of your facts? " he demanded, in the same acid, embittered voice.

" From first to last," affirmed Mr. Jobling, so peevishly that Slyne was satisfied. " Haven't I told you that I've spent five years of my life and every penny I could — er — every penny I possessed, in sifting them out, and that I'm a Chancery practitioner? I have most of the papers with me at the Métropole. There's only the one link lacking to complete the long chain I've forged. And — " He lowered his voice to a whisper after looking about him furtively, and, at last, under the decent screen of the darkness, completely demoralised by the events of the day, confided in the Heaven-sent stranger beside him his chief ambition in coming to Monte Carlo. " And even a good enough imitation might serve — "

" No imitation would stand the strain," Slyne interrupted him hoarsely. " And you'll very soon find yourself inside the four walls of a cell, my friend, if you try any forgery of that sort. You can take my word for that, because — *I'm* the real rivet, and without me all the rest of your precious chain isn't worth a snap of my fingers."

Mr. Jobling subsided into a heap, and was staring at him, open-mouthed. But Slyne said no more for a moment or two. Outwardly quite calm and matter-of-fact, his mind was in a seething turmoil. If all the inept rogue beside him had said were true — He could scarcely restrain an impulse to get to his feet and shout for joy.

The lawyer seemed to have nothing more to say, either. And Slyne, having somewhat recovered command of himself, at length rose, tossing his cold cigar away with an angry oath. " It makes my blood boil," said he, " to think — But for the sheerest accident you'd be a dead

man by now — and where would *I* have been then! You don't deserve such stupendous luck, and, by the Lord Harry! if I find you playing the fool again — You're going to put yourself into my hands from now on, d'ye hear? And, in the first place, I must see those papers you spoke of; if they're in order, I'll see the thing through. We can't work without each other, unfortunately for me, or — "

" You're going too fast," intervened Mr. Jobling, still seated, and with some faint show of spirit. " You're taking too much for granted, sir. I don't even know who you are, and — we must come to terms of some sort before — "

He shrank aside as Slyne stepped forward with twitching fingers and eyes aflame.

" You'll take whatever terms you get — and be precious thankful," hissed Slyne, stooping over him. " You'll do exactly what you're told, no more, and no less. And — you won't forget again, will you, that you've met your master in me? "

Mr. Jobling, gazing, aghast, into the muzzle of the cheap revolver which had proved so ineffective in his own hands, at last regained voice enough to subscribe solemnly to these stipulations, and from that moment went uncomfortably, in fear for the life he himself had been trying to take not an hour before. That was probably the first time he had ever been threatened with personal violence, and a life spent chiefly in Chancery Lane does not always foster an excess of that calculating courage needed to deal with one of Slyne's dangerous sort.

" Come on, then," said Slyne, and Mr. Jobling got shakily up from the bench. " You needn't be afraid that I won't deal fair — generously with you, but this is no time

to be haggling here. We haven't a moment to spare. I must see those papers at once. Step out!"

The hall-porter at the Métropole raised his eyebrows over Mr. Jobling's somewhat dishevelled appearance, but promptly lowered them again in response to a look from Slyne.

"Tell them to send up your bill," said Slyne to the lawyer. "If everything's all right, I'll settle it and put you up at the Paris."

And Mr. Jobling very meekly did as he was bidden. He could not well help himself, just then. But his expression was not at all properly grateful as he ushered Slyne into the room he himself had never expected to see again, and there proceeded to display to that masterful adventurer the mass of papers on which their further partnership was to depend.

Slyne picked out the more important of these with an acumen which would have done Mr. Jobling himself every credit; and for a busy hour they two sat poring over one dog's-eared document after another, Slyne's mask of indifference deserting him by degrees as he grasped point after point of the case, till he threw the last down with a smile of triumph, and, rising from the table, paced to and fro for a moment, rubbing his hands in an ecstasy of exultation.

"Everything's all right," he announced confidently. "My — our fortune's as good as made; and I'll tell you what, Jobling, — you shall have ten per cent. of the immediate cash for your share. How does that strike you, eh? I don't say that you deserve any such consideration from me, but — I'm ready to let bygones be bygones, and I want you to work for me with a will."

His self-assurance was contagious. Mr. Jobling, after

the merest moment of hesitation, rose in his turn, holding out a hand, which Slyne grasped affectionately. And thus they came to an amicable understanding, without more words.

"Pack up now," commanded Slyne, pleasantly peremptory, "and we'll run across to the Paris. I've any amount to do yet, before I can snatch a sleep."

"I'll be very thankful to get into *my* bed," said Mr. Jobling, already busy among his belongings, and more than a little dazed by the march of events. "I've had a *most* trying day."

It did not take long to have his baggage transferred to the other hotel, and there Slyne put him under confidential charge of the manager, with very strict orders that he was not, on any pretext whatever, to be allowed to decamp pending Slyne's return. Whereafter that active man of affairs sent to the garage for his car, with word that his chauffeur need not be disturbed and, having deposited his still uncounted winnings with the cashier, started eastward again in such haste that he would not even wait to change his thin evening clothes.

Slyne was, in fact, fiercely excited. His particular Providence seemed to be holding out to him such a chance in life as he could scarcely have conceived himself in his wildest dreams. And he was in such frantic haste to grasp that chance — which involved so much more than the mere money — that he had quite forgotten his recent fear of M. Dubois.

"I think I've got you this time, my girl!" said he to himself gleefully, as he once more slowed down to stop at the Italian frontier. And that was the burden of all his thoughts as he raced madly along the Corniche Road in

his high-powered car. In the darkness before the dawn, his eyes intent on the long white ribbon of highway endlessly slipping toward his head-lights, he saw only roseate visions of what the future now held for him. As the sun rose to burnish the bare, brown mountains before him, he nodded happily to himself, and his lips moved again to the glad refrain, "I think I've got you quite safe this time, my girl!"

CHAPTER XII

THE PRICE OF FREEDOM

SLYNE'S nostrils curled as he observed the dirty and dishevelled aspect of the *Olive Branch,* lying idle in Genoa harbour alongside the coal-chutes where the day's work had not yet begun. He had grown extremely fastidious again within the very short space of time which had passed since he had last seen her.

There was no one visible about her littered decks except the watchman on duty, whose sole salute to him as he stepped carefully up the insecure gangplank was a sullen scowl.

But that might have been deemed quite a hearty welcome in contrast with his reception by Captain Dove.

Captain Dove was, in point of fact, furious when he opened his little, red-rimmed eyes and became aware of his former friend's intrusion upon his privacy. Sitting up in his frowsy bunk, with the blankets huddled about him, looking ludicrously like an incensed gorilla, he raged and swore at his gratuitous visitor until his voice gave out.

Slyne, forgetful, in his new enthusiasm, of the terms on which they had parted, was at first somewhat taken aback by that outburst; but only at first. And his sanguine anticipations enabled him to endure it unmoved. It also gave him time to collect his ideas. He could see that his errand was not going to prove quite so easy as he had ex-

pected, and that he must play his new cards with discrimination. As soon as the evil old man in the bunk had exhausted himself in invective, Slyne spoke, smooth and cuttingly.

"I came back to do you a good turn. But — if that's how you're going to take it, you foul-mouthed old rapparee! I'll save my breath and be off again. What th' deuce d'ye mean by shouting at me as if I were a drunken deck-hand! Speak to me above a whisper now — and you'll see what'll happen to you. That's the police-boat pulling past."

The opportune plash of oars had suggested to him that plausible threat. Captain Dove, listening intently, crouched back against the bulkhead, his blinking, hot, suspicious eyes on Slyne's. The boat passed on. But he had found time to observe that Slyne was in evening dress, with an expensive fur coat to keep the cold out. And Slyne's cool contempt for his ill-temper would seem to have impressed him no less than Slyne's air of solid prosperity.

He himself, it appeared, had had care and adversity for his companions ever since parting with his former friend. His chief aim in calling at Genoa had been cheap coal and cheaper repairs, and he thought that he was less likely to be recognised there than elsewhere in the Mediterranean. But coal, he had found, had risen to a ruinous price in consequence of a recent strike among the miners in England; and for even the most trifling repairs he would have to wait at least a week, because the dock-yard people were already working over-time to make way for a man-of-war. Credit of any sort was not to be had. His portage-bill bade fair to swamp his insufficient cash resources — even although three of his now scanty crew had already deserted. And who could foretell what might happen to him if they should

get wagging their tongues too freely in some wine-shop ashore! While, as if for climax, the Customs' authorities had been displaying a most suspicious interest in him and his ship. Under such circumstances, even a saint might have been pardoned, as he pointed out, for showing a temper something short of seraphic.

"And you've been doing me good turns — by your way of it — for some time past," he continued, in a stifled, vehement whisper lest his voice should still reach the receding boat. "Though — " He waved a clawlike hand about him, words again failing him to describe adequately his sufferings in consequence, as who should say, "See the result for yourself."

Slyne sat down on the sofa opposite him, not even condescending to glance, in response to that invitation, round the squalid, poverty-stricken little cabin. "Never mind about some time past," he advised, more pacifically. "You'll never get rich quick yesterday. To-day's when *I'm* going to make my pile. And I meant to let you in — "

"To another hole," Captain Dove concluded sceptically. "I only wish you'd show me some sure way out of the one I'm in."

Slyne looked his annoyance at that further interruption, and made as if to rise, but did no more than draw his gold cigarette-case from its pocket. He knew that Captain Dove was merely trying to aggravate him, and it would not have been politic to stray from the matter in hand. He lighted a cigarette at his leisure and waited for what should come next. He had changed his mind as to taking the old man fully into his confidence. He thought he could see his way to get all he wanted for a very great deal less than that might have cost him.

"Want a drink?" Captain Dove demanded, no doubt with the idea that a dose of spirit might serve to stir up his visitor's temper, and looked surprised at Slyne's curt head-shake, still more surprised over his response.

"I can't afford to drink at all hours of the day and night now," said Slyne austerely. "That sort of thing was all very well at sea, but — The business I have in hand isn't of the sort that can be carried out on raw brandy. And you'll have to taper off too, if you want to come in."

"Strike — me — sky-blue!" exclaimed the old man, and Slyne held up a reproving hand.

"I can do with a good deal less of your bad language into the bargain," he mentioned coldly, "if you don't mind. In short, I want you to understand from the start that you've got to behave as if you were a reasonable human being and not a dangerous lunatic, or — I'll leave you to rot, in the hole you've got yourself into."

Captain Dove, scarcely able to credit the evidence of his own ears but, none the less, apparently, thinking hard, darted a very ugly glance at him, and noticed the diamonds in his shirt-front. Under the strongest temptation to call in a couple of deck-hands and have him thrown off the ship, Captain Dove obviously paused to consider whether those could be of any intrinsic value. He was, of course, satisfied that he knew exactly how much — or, rather, how little money Slyne had had in his pockets when he went ashore. And, if Slyne had already, within four and twenty hours, been able to turn that over at a profit sufficient to provide himself with a fur coat and diamonds, it might perhaps pay Captain Dove to hear what he had to propose. Slyne, reading all the old man's thoughts, could see that he had decided to temporise.

"But, I can do with a damn sight less of *your* back-chat!" rumbled Captain Dove, not to be put down without protest. "If you've come back on board to offer me a founder's share in any new gold-brick factory, fire straight ahead — and be short about it. It'll save time, too, if you'll take it from me again that I'd rather have your room than your company."

And at that, Slyne made his next considered move.

"All right," he said in a tone of the most utter contempt. "That's enough. I'm off.

"I came back to do you a good turn — although few men, in my position, would ever have looked near you again," he paused in the doorway to remark acridly. "But I can see now what's the matter with you — and I only wish I had noticed it in time to save myself all it has cost me. It's senile decay you're suffering from. You're far too old to be of any more use — even to yourself. You're in your dotage, and you'll soon be in an asylum — for pauper lunatics!"

He had evidently lost his own temper at last. And Captain Dove was visibly pleased with that result of his tactics; as a rule he was better able to cope with Slyne on a basis of mutual abuse, heated on both sides; Slyne cool and collected had him at a disadvantage.

"Now you're talking!" he retorted approvingly. "Say what's in your mind, straightforwardly, and we'll soon come to an understanding. Sit down again, you strutting peacock! and tell me what it is you want."

Slyne did not sit down again, however; to do so would scarcely have been dignified. He stayed in the doorway, silent, a thin stream of cigarette-smoke slowly filtering from his nostrils. His cold, calculating eyes were once more

on Captain Dove's. And it was Captain Dove's would-be mocking glance that at length gave way.

"You offered to give me Sallie, if I paid you a hundred thousand dollars," said Slyne, judicially.

"To see you safely married to her," Captain Dove corrected him.

Slyne nodded, in grave assent.

"Well, I'm going to hold you to your offer," said he. "The money's ready and waiting for you — just as soon as we can settle a few trifling formalities. I have Sallie's promise to marry me — "

"The devil you have!" said Captain Dove, not slow to seize opportunity either. "I thought I heard her say — "

Slyne's face darkened again. "And, if you'll come ashore with me now," he went on, controlling his temper, "I'll prove to you that your money is perfectly safe."

Captain Dove lay back in his bunk and laughed, most discordantly. He laughed till his red-rimmed eyes were adrip, while Slyne sat looking at him. He was still laughing when Slyne rose and, flicking the cigarette-end from between two nicotine-stained fingers, began to button his coat. He stopped laughing then, by calculated degrees.

"Sit down — sit down!" said he wheezily. "What's your hurry? You haven't told me yet what those few 'trifling formalities' are. And how am I to know whether — "

But Slyne was already beyond the doorway, fumbling with a last button.

"If you believe I've come here to talk simply for the sake of talking," said he with sombre magnificence, "I needn't waste any more breath on you. Good-bye."

Captain Dove jumped out of his bunk. He was clearly

impressed, in spite of himself, by the other's indomitable assurance.

"Come back, you fool!" he called angrily. "Come back. I want to know —

"I'll go ashore with you," he shouted, raising his voice, since Slyne was already on his way to the gangway. But Slyne did not seem to hear.

"I'll take your offer — for Sallie," cried Captain Dove, in a slightly lower tone.

Slyne hesitated in his stride, stopped, and turned back into the alleyway which led to the saloon.

"What was that you said?" he demanded of Captain Dove.

"Come on inside," requested Captain Dove, more curtly.

"I don't believe I will," Slyne declared, inwardly elated over the winning of that somewhat risky move. "You don't deserve another chance. And, if I do give you another, you needn't suppose — "

"Come on inside," begged Captain Dove, shivering, in no case to listen to any lecture. "Come on, and we'll talk sense. Don't waste any more good time."

Slyne followed him in again, congratulating himself on his firmness. He felt that he had gained the whip-hand of the old man, and he meant to keep it. He curtly refused again Captain Dove's more hospitable offer of some refreshment, and, while his aggrieved host was clumsily getting into some warmer clothing, talked to him from the saloon through the open doorway of his cramped sleeping-quarters. It was easier to arrange matters so than under Captain Dove's direct observation.

"You'll pay me cash, of course," Captain Dove stip-

ulated, as though he had been bargaining about a charter-party.

"I'll pay you cash," Slyne agreed, "the day Sallie marries me. And meantime I'll give you my note of hand at thirty days for the money." He listened intently, but Captain Dove, struggling fretfully with refractory buttons, maintained an ominous silence.

"I'll have it backed by a London lawyer, to keep you safe," said Slyne. "And listen! I'm not asking you to risk anything, or even to take my note at its face value. I want you to come ashore with me and find out for yourself from my lawyer that you can depend on the money. If you don't feel satisfied about that after you've seen him, you needn't go any farther, we'll call the bargain off; you can get back on board your ship at once and no harm done.

"And, even as regards Sallie, I'm going out of my way to keep you right. I'd give a great deal to get married at once, but — I'm willing to wait till the day I can hand you your hundred thousand in cash. Everything's fair, square, and above-board now. I'm not asking you to risk anything.

"And where in the wide world can you expect to do better for yourself!" he argued. "If you go East you'll get no more for the girl — and look at the expense! You'll be sorry all the rest of your life, too, for I know you'd far sooner see her decently settled than sell her to any dog-faced son-of-a-gun of a mandarin!

"You can say what you like," he concluded, although Captain Dove had said never a word. "Clean money's pleasanter to spend than dirty, any day. If I had been born wealthy, I'd never have needed to touch a marked card. And now's your chance, too, to pull out of a rotten

rut that'll sooner or later land you among the chain-gang."

Captain Dove came forth from his cabin, indifferently clad, and eyed Slyne with a sarcastic interest which somewhat disconcerted that homilist.

"You don't *look* just like a Band o' Hope!" said the old man, "but —"

Slyne rose again, and bit his lip, in simulated impatience. "Oh, all right," said he. "If you're not interested —"

Captain Dove scowled at him. "I'm interested," he said grudgingly. "I'll see this lawyer-fellow of yours whenever you like to bring him aboard, and — if the money's there, you can count me in."

"He isn't the sort of lawyer you've been accustomed to, Dove," said Slyne. "You've got to go to him."

Captain Dove did his best to out-stare him, but failed.

"And what's more," said Slyne, playing a trump card with great outward indifference, "you can make him pay you for your time instead of you paying him. I told you I came back here to do you a good turn. There's more than a hundred thousand dollars of easy money for you in this deal — if you go the right way about it.

"But — don't take my word for anything."

Captain Dove had palpable difficulty in suppressing the obvious repartee to that last bit of advice. But cupidity and cunning kept him quiet for a space.

"All right. I'll go with you," he agreed very gruffly at last. And Slyne heaved a silent sigh of relief; he had feared more than once that the contest of wills would after all go against him.

"You're wise," he commented carelessly. "It will pay you.

"You'd better see Sallie now, don't you think, and tell her — "

"I'm not going to interfere between you and her — till I get my money from you," declared the old man with a crafty grin. "You must tackle her yourself. She'll be up by now, but breakfast won't be ready for half an hour. If I were you I'd take that coat off and let her have a sight of those diamonds of yours."

Slyne did not wait to hear any more. He was already on his way aft, a somewhat incongruous figure on the decks of the *Olive Branch*. When he reached the companion-hatch on the poop he was smiling sardonically.

"I do believe it was my 'diamonds' that finally fetched that old ruffian," said he to himself. "If they have the same effect on Sallie, I won't grudge the few francs I paid for them!"

He tiptoed down the short stairway, and, having tapped very quietly at the door of the after-saloon, entered without more ado. He judged that he might have difficulty in gaining admission if he delayed to ask leave.

The saloon was empty. But from an adjoining cabin came the sound of splashing, and from its neighbour the shuffle of heavy feet, a faint suggestion of deft hands busy among crisp muslin and sibilant silk.

Slyne hesitated; he wanted to be very tactful and yet was unwilling to give up the advantage he had thus gained. He closed the door carefully behind him. It creaked a little.

From the room whence had come the rustle of feminine garments an uncanny-looking figure appeared, and darted an angry, apprehensive glance about the saloon. The sound of splashing had ceased.

"' Morning, Ambrizette," said Slyne briskly and standing his ground. "Is your mistress up yet? Tell her I have Captain Dove's leave to pay her a call."

The dumb black dwarf's scowl grew darker, but her hand fell away from her breast and she halted as Sallie's voice sounded from within.

"Is that you, Jasper!" it ejaculated. "What do you want? I thought —"

"I've come back — with good news for you, Sallie — wonderful news!" said Slyne. "And I'm in no end of a hurry to be off again. Call Ambrizette in and get dressed, as quick as you can. Captain Dove's waiting breakfast for me and I mustn't delay him. How long will you be?"

"What sort of news is it?" asked Sallie, no less dubious than her maid had been; and called her maid in, notwithstanding her well-founded doubts as to the nature of any news he could bring. For Slyne had held out to her the same lure that the serpent offered to Eve, and her womanly curiosity would not allow her to order him at once from her domain.

Slyne smiled slightly as he sat down in a basket-chair, to look about him while she was still busy within. The little after-saloon which had been her home for so long was finely furnished; more so, perhaps, than was apparent to Slyne, whose taste in that respect inclined to the florid. But he could not help noticing how dainty and neat and feminine was its entire effect, with its cushioned cosy corners, snow-white curtains and draperies. Its purely fragrant atmosphere stirred even Slyne's conscience a little.

He lay back in his seat, and, gazing about him, recalled to mind all he had been able to learn as to Sallie's strange past. It all fitted in so perfectly with the fabric of his

wonderful new plans that he could find no possible flaw in them. And when Sallie herself at length came out to him from her cabin, he was optimistically disposed to be very generous in his dealings with her.

Fresh from her bath and doubly bewitching in her clinging, intimate draperies, she met Slyne's glad, eager glance with grave, doubtful eyes, and ignored entirely the hand he held out to her as he sprang from his chair. But he affected not to notice her attitude of distrust, and, greeting her gaily, saved his face by laying his outstretched hand on another chair, which he set a little nearer his own.

"Won't you sit down?" he suggested with debonair courtesy.

But she shook her head; she was evidently afraid to receive him on any such friendly footing. She did not even care to ask him what he was doing in evening dress at breakfast-time and on board the *Olive Branch*. But in her troubled eyes he could read that unspoken inquiry.

"I've been travelling all night to get back to you, Sallie," he told her, in a low, eager tone, "and I hadn't time to change — I was in such a hurry to tell you the news. I've come to take you away from the *Olive Branch*, — and Captain Dove. I've come to set you free."

She stared at him as though she had not heard aright, her lips parted, her eyebrows arched, a faint, puzzled, questioning frown on her forehead.

"I've come to set you free," he said again.

"At what price?" she asked suddenly, with disconcerting directness, and his would-be straightforward glance wavered.

"Don't put it that way!" he urged. "I ask no more than the fulfilment of the promise you made me. And —

listen, Sallie. I've found out who you really are and where your home is. I'll take you there if only you —

"I'm not asking you to marry me right away, either, remember. All you must do in the meantime is to sign without question some papers that will be required. Then I'll make everything quite safe for you and take you to your own home."

The quick doubt in her eyes had given place to an expression of helpless amazement and growing dismay. But he did not wait to hear anything she might have to say.

"It's like this, you see," he went on hurriedly. "Captain Dove's absolutely at the end of his wits for money, and now — I can pay him his price for you if you'll keep your promise to me by and by. Otherwise I can't; no matter how willing I might be, I can't, I swear to you.

"He feels, too, that you owe it to him to make up in one way or another for some part at least of what he and I have lost through your — your interfering so much lately in his affairs. And, if you don't back me up now, he'll have to take the *Olive Branch* East as best he can. He'll take you too, and — you'll never come back.

"You don't understand. I'm not really trying to force you to marry me, but to save you from a fate far worse than the worst you could imagine. You don't understand that it's really freedom I'm offering you, and that your only option is slavery.

"You'd rather have a white man — even me! — for your husband, wouldn't you? than a yellow one — or brown — or maybe black!"

CHAPTER XIII

A MASTERSTROKE

SALLIE sat down quickly in a cushioned chair, and lay back, trembling like a captured bird.

Slyne was not beyond feeling somewhat ashamed of himself, but found easy solace in the reflection that all he had said was for her good as well as his own. He could see that his last brutal argument had struck home. For Sallie could no longer doubt, now, in the lurid light of her recent experiences, that Captain Dove looked upon her as a mere chattel, to be turned into cash as soon as occasion should offer.

In a little she looked up at him again out of pleading, desperate eyes. Some most unusual impulse of pity stirred him. She was only a young girl yet, and her helplessness spoke its own appeal, even to him. He made up his mind again, quite apart from any question of policy, to deal with her as generously as might be practicable.

"Will Captain Dove let me go now if I promise to marry you, Jasper?" she asked. And he nodded solemnly.

"And not unless I do?" she insisted. "You *know* I didn't — before, although you say I did."

"I swear to God, Sallie," he declared, "that I can't raise the money the Old Man wants any other way. And — I won't say another word about what's past and done with.

"If you'll really promise to marry me," he said eagerly, "I'll prove to you that all I have told you is true before you need even leave Captain Dove; I won't ask you to go a step farther with me until you're perfectly satisfied; I'll take you safely to your own home as soon as you *are* satisfied that you can trust me. And I won't ask you to keep your promise till — "

An irrepressible light of longing had leaped up behind the despair in her eyes.

"You say that all I must do in the meantime is to sign some papers," she interrupted. "You say you won't ask me to marry you right away. Will you wait — a year? "

"A year! I couldn't, Sallie! " he cried, and her pale lips drooped piteously again.

"How long, then? " she asked in a whisper. "Six months? "

He had made up his mind to be generous, and he felt that he had not failed in his intention as he answered, "Three months, and not a day longer, Sallie."

She sat still and silent for a while, considering that, and then, "All right, Jasper," she agreed. "Take me safe home, and I'll marry you three months from the day we get there — if we're both alive when the time comes."

He turned away from her for a moment. He had won all he wanted in the meantime, and he could scarcely contain himself. When he presently held out a hand to her, she took it, to bind that bargain.

"And you won't have any cause to regret it, Sallie," he assured her, his voice somewhat hoarse in spite of his effort to speak quite naturally.

"So now, as soon as you're ready, we'll all go ashore together, and — "

"I'll be ready in twenty minutes," she told him, clasping her hands at her heart, her eyes very eager. "And, Jasper — you must let me take Ambrizette with me."

"You're free now to do as you like," he answered, and left her. He felt as if he were treading on air on his way back to the mid-ship saloon.

Captain Dove, in the same *négligé* costume, was busy at breakfast when Slyne walked in upon him again, but looked up from his plate for long enough to mumble a malicious question.

"Yes, I've fixed it all up with her," Slyne answered with assumed nonchalance. "You can always trust me to know how to handle a woman, Dove."

Captain Dove shot a derisive glance in his direction. "Is she willing to marry you after all, then?" he demanded, feigning a surprise by no means complimentary.

"Not just at once, of course," returned his companion, and left the old man to infer whatever he pleased.

In response to a shouted order of Captain Dove's a slatternly cook-steward brought Slyne a steaming platter of beans with a bit of bacon-rind on top, and an enamelled mug containing a brew which might, by courtesy, have been called coffee. There was a tray of broken ship's biscuits, a tin containing some peculiarly rank substitute for butter, upon the table, with the other equally uninviting concomitants of a meagre meal.

"*Tchk-tchk!*" commented Slyne, and sat down to satisfy his hunger as best he might; while Captain Dove, having overheard that criticism, eyed him inimically, and proceeded to puff a peculiarly rank cigar in his face.

"You might as well be getting dressed now," said Slyne indifferently. "By the time I'm through here, Sallie will be ready to go ashore."

Captain Dove looked very fiercely at him, but without effect.

"Sallie won't stir a step from the ship," the old man affirmed, "till you've handed over the cash."

Slyne looked up, in mild surprise.

"But, dear me! Dove," he remarked, "you don't expect that the London lawyer's going to take my word for a girl he's never even seen? Until he's satisfied on that point, he won't endorse my note to you. So we've *got* to take her along with us. I'm doing my best to give you a square deal; and all I ask in return is a square deal from you."

"You'd better not try any crooked games with me," growled Captain Dove, and sat for a time sunk in obviously aggravating reflections.

"If we get on his soft side," suggested Slyne insidiously, "there's no saying how much more we might both make."

Captain Dove rose and retired into his sleeping-cabin without further words; while Slyne, picking out with a two-pronged fork the cleanest of the beans on his plate, smiled sneeringly to himself.

"What's the latest long-shore fashion, Slyne?" the old man asked after an interval. Slyne knew by his tone that he had dismissed dull care from his mind and was prepared to be quarrelsome again.

"It wouldn't suit a figure like yours," he answered coolly, and was gratified to hear another hoarse growl. For, strange though it may seem, Captain Dove was not without vanity. "All you really need to worry about is

how to keep sober. And I want it to be understood from the start — "

"Not so much of it now!" snarled Captain Dove from his cabin. "You attend to your own business — and I'll attend to mine. I know how to behave myself — among gentlemen. And, don't you forget, either, that I'm going ashore to play my own hand. I've a card or two up my sleeve, Mister Slyne, that will maybe euchre your game for you — if you try to bluff too high."

Slyne swore hotly, under his breath. He would have given a great deal to know exactly what the old man meant by that mysterious threat, and only knew that it would be useless to ask him. There was nothing for it but to put up with his capricious humours, as patiently as might be — although Slyne shivered in anticipation of the strain that might entail — till he could be dispensed with or got rid of altogether.

Nor, as it presently appeared, were his fears at all ill-founded. For Captain Dove emerged from his cabin got up for shore-going in a guise at sight of which Slyne could by no means suppress an involuntary groan.

"I'm all ready now," Captain Dove announced. "Will you pay for a cab if I call one?"

"My car's waiting," Slyne returned, and, as the old man whistled amazedly over that further and unexpected proof that his former accomplice's fortunes had changed for the better, "You look like a fool in that outfit," said Slyne. "The right rig-out for motoring is a tweed suit and a soft cap."

Captain Dove was very visibly annoyed. He had been at particular pains to array himself properly. "You want to be the only swell in the party, of course!" he grunted.

"You're jealous, that's what's the matter with you." And he fell to polishing his furry, old-fashioned top-hat with a tail of the scanty, ill-fitting frock-coat he had donned along with a noisome waistcoat in honour of the occasion.

Slyne shrugged his shoulders, despairingly, and, having made an end of his unappetising meal, prepared for the road. Then he lighted a cigar very much at his leisure, while Captain Dove regarded him grimly, and led the way on deck without further words.

Sallie was ready and waiting at the companion-hatch on the poop, as pretty as a picture in the sables Captain Dove had given her a year before — after a very lucrative season of poaching on the Siberian coast. As soon as she caught sight of them she came forward, followed by Ambrizette, whose appearance, in cloak and turban, was even a worse offence to Slyne's fastidious taste than Captain Dove's had been.

"What a calamitous circus!" he muttered between set teeth. "I must get rid of those two somehow — and soon. But till then —

"My car's at the back of those coal-wagons there," he told Captain Dove with great dignity, and Captain Dove turned to the engine-room hatch.

"Below there!" he called down. "Is that Mr. Brasse? I'm off now, Brasse. You'll carry out all my instructions, eh? And — don't quarrel with Da Costa, d'ye hear?"

"Ay, ay, sir," answered a dreary voice from the depths below, and Captain Dove faced about again to find Sallie, flushed and anxious, waiting with Ambrizette at the gangway.

"Come on," he ordered irascibly, and Sallie followed him

down the plank. Ambrizette shuffled fearfully after her, and Slyne came last, his chin in the air, triumphant.

He led the way to his car, and was gratified to observe its salutary effect on Captain Dove's somewhat contemptuous demeanour. The little policeman in charge of it pending its opulent owner's return, came forward, touching his képi, which further impressed Captain Dove, uncomfortably. Slyne handed Sallie into the tonneau, and Ambrizette after her, tossed the policeman a further tip which secured his everlasting esteem, took his own seat at the wheel, and was hastily followed by Captain Dove.

"Where are we bound for?" asked Captain Dove, holding his top-hat on with both hands, as Slyne took the road toward Sampierdarena at a round pace.

"Don't talk to the man at the wheel," answered Slyne, and laughed. "We've a hundred miles or so ahead of us. Better chuck that old tile of yours away and tie a handkerchief round your head; you'll find that less uncomfortable."

The old man, at a loss for any more effective retort, pulled his antiquated beaver down almost to his ears, folded his long arms across the chest of his flapping frock-coat, and sat silent, scowling at the baggy umbrella between his knees. Nor did he open his mouth again during the swift journey.

But when they at length reached their destination and Slyne stopped the car quietly before the imposing pile that forms the Hôtel de Paris, Captain Dove's jaw dropped and his mouth opened mechanically.

A resplendent porter came hurrying forward and bowed most humbly to the magnificent Slyne.

"Take this lady and her maid straight up to the suite

next mine," ordered Slyne as Sallie alighted, while Captain Dove listened, all ears. "And ask Mr. Jobling to join me in my sitting-room. He's still here, I suppose?"

He gave vent to a heartfelt sigh of relief as the man, already preceding his charges indoors, paused to answer in the affirmative.

"I needn't book a room for you," he told Captain Dove, with calculated indifference. "But Sallie must have somewhere to leave Ambrizette.

"Hey! you. Call my chauffeur to take the car round to the garage."

Captain Dove followed him toward the bureau, attracting not a few glances of mingled surprise and amusement from the elaborate idlers in its neighbourhood. Slyne was furious.

"I can't have him tagging about after me in that ghastly get-up!" he told himself on the way to the elevator; and cuffed the elevator-boy's ears at the sound of a mirthful sneeze with which that unfortunate youth had become afflicted. "Though how the deuce I'm to help myself I don't know."

In the corridor at which they got out he caught sight of Mr. Jobling approaching, and hurried Captain Dove into the sitting-room of his suite.

"Give me five minutes to change my clothes," he requested of the old man. "And don't get straying about, or you'll lose yourself."

Mr. Jobling met him on the threshold as he shut the door. That gentleman had marvellously recovered from his over-night's nervous break-down. A sound sleep, a visit from the barber, a bath and a liberal breakfast had all helped to alter him outwardly and inwardly for the better.

He was once more the respectably prosperous, self-confident solicitor.

"I believe you've been out all night," he observed in a jocular tone of reproof, a waggish forefinger uplifted.

"I've covered a couple of hundred miles in the car while you've been asleep," answered Slyne, turning into his dressing-room. "I've brought the girl back with me — and the old man, her guardian. We're going to have trouble with him unless we're very careful. So listen, and I'll tell you how things stand."

Mr. Jobling composed his features into their most professional aspect, but that gave place by degrees to a variety of other expressions, while Slyne, busy changing his clothes, related all he himself knew as to Sallie's past history.

"And now the old man thinks he is entitled to put a price on her," Slyne concluded. "She's promised to marry me, but he won't let her go till I hand him a hundred thousand dollars."

Mr. Jobling lay back limply in his chair. In all his career he had never, he asserted, heard a more scandalous suggestion.

"Never mind about that," Slyne cut him short. "The money's no object to me. But you can understand what a difficult fellow he is to deal with. And what I'm going to do, merely as a precaution against his playing us false in the end, is to give him my note of hand for the amount he demands, endorsed by you, and payable the day I marry his adopted daughter."

Mr. Jobling sank still lower in his seat.

"In return for that," Slyne went on, "he must sign a clear deliverance from any further claim on any of us, subject, of course, to due payment of the note.

"Then, I want a document drawn up to confirm my engagement to the girl and granting me the fullest possible power of attorney on her behalf both before and after our marriage. She's so simple and inexperienced that I must do everything for her.

"And, lastly, you'd better make out a brief private agreement between yourself and me — just as a matter of form, you know — to the effect that you are willing to act in my interests throughout, in return for a commission of ten per cent. on the accumulated revenues of the Jura estates at the date of my marriage."

Mr. Jobling looked at him for a time as a man suddenly bereft of his spine might.

"There's no time to spare," Slyne mentioned. "I want all that sort of thing settled right off the reel — before lunch.

"If the old man makes any kick about anything, you must back me up in all I say. Although if he tries to raise his price by a few thousand dollars, we needn't stick at that. The great thing is to get him to sign the deliverance in return for our note. The girl has already agreed — "

"And what if *I* refuse?" croaked his companion with the courage of desperation. It was evident that Mr. Jobling saw through his daring scheme. "What if I insist on my fair share? What if I — "

Slyne silenced him with a contemptuous gesture.

"Whatever you do will make no difference to anyone in the wide world but yourself," said Slyne. "If you do what you're told you'll get a great deal more than you deserve out of it. If you don't — D'ye think I'd have taken you into the team if I didn't know how to drive you!" he asked, his eyes beginning to blaze. "Why, my good

fellow, if you refuse, if you don't travel up to your collar, if you so much as shy at anything you see or hear — I won't even hurt you; I'll just hand you over to the police.

"So make up your mind now, quick!"

"You've nothing against me," quavered the lawyer.

"No, I've nothing — not very much, at least, yet," Slyne agreed, knotting his tie neatly before the glass. "But — that may be because you haven't embezzled any of my money — yet." He had most opportunely recalled what the detective Dubois had told him about his new friend.

Mr. Jobling's face was almost green. He got up with an evident effort.

"I was only joking," he declared with a most ghastly grin. "I'll be quite satisfied with ten per cent. of the accumulated income — in fact, we'll call it a couple of hundred thousand pounds, if you like."

"All right," Slyne agreed imperturbably. "Make it that amount if you'd rather. How long will it take you to get the papers drawn out? It's nearly one o'clock. And — you won't be safe till they're signed."

"An hour," said Mr. Jobling. "I'm a quick writer."

"All right," Slyne repeated. "We'll lunch at two — after they're all signed. So — off you go, and get busy."

The stout solicitor hurried away, cowed and obedient again, and Slyne, very smart in an almost new flannel suit, rejoined Captain Dove.

"I'm *too* fashionable, that's what's the matter with me!" declared Captain Dove with sudden conviction at sight of him, and gazed very bitterly at his own image in an inconvenient mirror.

"Never mind about that," Slyne advised soothingly.

" It's not as if you were staying here, you know. You'll be back on board your ship by supper-time. And now, I must tell you how we've got to handle this lawyer-fellow when he fetches in the raft of papers he'll want us all to sign."

Captain Dove listened gloomily while he went on to explain, at considerable length, and in his most convincing manner, that they must match their combined wits against the lawyer's for their own profit.

" It's not that I don't trust him," said Slyne, " but — I'll feel more secure after everything's settled in writing and signed. He can't go back on us then."

" He'd better not! " Captain Dove commented. " I'll wring his neck for him if he tries — "

" And, as for Sallie," Slyne cut him short, " I've made things quite — "

" Sallie will do whatever I tell her," growled Captain Dove. " And don't you attempt to interfere between me and her — till you've paid me my money, Slyne. Where is she? Fetch her in here."

Slyne had no farther to go to do that than to the next room, where he found Sallie at the window, gazing pensively out at the sea. But he delayed there for some time to make it still more clear to her that her only hope of helping herself lay in abetting him blindly.

When he at length returned to his own sitting-room with her, he found Captain Dove staring fixedly at another arrival there, an overwhelmingly up-to-date if rather imbecile-looking young man, whose general gorgeousness, combined with a very vacant, fish-like eye much magnified by a monocle, had evidently reduced the would-be fashionable seaman to a stricken silence.

Slyne, who had at first shot a most malevolent glance at the intruder, was stepping forward to greet him just as Mr. Jobling put in an appearance with a sheaf of papers in one hand.

"How d'ye do, Lord Ingoldsby?" said Slyne quite suavely to the young man with the eye-glass. He had caught sight of Mr. Jobling in the doorway, and turned to Sallie, his quick mind bent on a masterstroke.

"May I introduce to you the Marquis of Ingoldsby," he remarked to her in the monotone of convention; and, as she bowed slightly in response to that very modern young gentleman's ingratiating wriggle and grin, Slyne, one eye on Captain Dove's astonished countenance, completed the formality.

"This is Lady Josceline Justice," said he to his smirking lordship, and breathed delicately into a somewhat extensive ear the further information, "the late Earl of Jura's daughter, you know — and my *fiancée*."

CHAPTER XIV

" SALLIE HARRIS "

SALLIE'S first startled impulse was to deny the new identity Slyne had so glibly bestowed on her. It seemed too preposterous to be believable; and she was very suspicious of him. A little flushed, more than a little afraid, and yet in some sense convinced in spite of herself by the outward and visible signs about her that all these strange happenings must have at least some foundation of fact, she sought to read the others' thoughts in their faces.

The Marquis of Ingoldsby was gaping at her, in open wonder and admiration. Slyne's features wore a subdued expression of triumph, and Captain Dove's a dazed, incredulous frown. Mr. Jobling was beaming about him, so apparently satisfied with her, so respectably prosperous-looking himself that her doubts as to Slyne's good faith began to give way. When the lawyer was in turn presented to her and also addressed her by that new name, she could scarcely disclaim it.

" You'll stay and have luncheon with us, Lord Ingoldsby? " Slyne remarked, touching the bell; and his lordship left off gaping at Sallie to look him over with all the solemn sagacity of a young owl in broad daylight.

" Er — all right," his lordship at length agreed. " Don't mind if I do.

" Though I have some — er — friends waitin' for me,"

he added as an afterthought, " that I promised to take for a run in your car, if — "

" You'll have time enough after lunch," Slyne suggested, and drew the noble marquis toward the window.

" The Marquis of Ingoldsby! " muttered Captain Dove. " A run in Slyne's car! And — *Lady Josceline Justice!* " He dug his knuckles forcibly into his blinking eyes, and, " I seem to be wide enough awake," said he in a stage aside as several waiters arrived on the scene.

While they were setting the table Sallie tried to collect her thoughts. Slyne had told her nothing till then, but that he had found out who her folk were. And she had come away from the *Olive Branch* blindly, only a little less distrustful of him than of Captain Dove's cruel intentions toward her if she had remained on board. Even now, she scarcely dared to believe —

In response to a sign from Slyne she took her place at the flower-decked table. The Marquis of Ingoldsby immediately settled himself at her side; he also was obviously a young man who knew what he wanted, and meant to have that at all hazards and, while the others were seating themselves, he ogled her killingly.

Slyne had sat down at her other hand, leaving Mr. Jobling and Captain Dove to keep one another company behind the great silver centre-piece which adorned the circular table. The marquis, leaning on one elbow, had turned his back on Mr. Jobling, and Slyne turned his on Captain Dove.

" This *is* a little bit of all right! " his lordship remarked to Sallie, with a confidential grin. " Only — I wish — How is it that we haven't met before, Lady Josephine? But never mind that. Let's be pals now. Shall we, eh? "

"I don't know," Sallie answered at random and since he seemed to expect some reply to that fatuity. She had met a good many men in her time, but never one quite like this Lord Ingoldsby — who actually seemed anxious to look and act like a cunning fool.

A waiter intervened between them. But his lordship waved that functionary away.

"Do let's," he implored with child-like insistence. "It would be so deevy to be pals with you. And I'm beastly dull here, all by myself, don't y'know. So —

"Eh?" He glared at Slyne, who had bluntly interrupted his *tête-à-tête*. "No, I *don't* want any oysters — I told that waiter-chap so. And I *don't* know any 'lady of the camellias.' I can't imagine what you're talkin' about at all, I'm sure."

"I saw her again last night, at the Casino," said Slyne, imperturbably, and went on to entertain Sallie with a long if not over-truthful account of his own over-night's doings there. So that, for all his lordship's lack of manners, it was some time before that spoiled youth again succeeded in monopolising her attention. At every turn Slyne was ready to balk him, and, but for his native self-conceit coupled with a certain blind obstinacy, he must very soon have understood what was perfectly plain to Sallie, that he was there merely on sufferance, to serve some purpose of Slyne's.

"Goin' to be here long, Lady Josephine?" he managed to break in at last. Slyne had turned to give a departing waiter some order.

"I don't know," Sallie answered again, since she could say nothing else.

"Hope to goodness you are," declared his lordship.

"Stay for a week or two, anyhow: and," — he lowered his voice to a husky whisper, leaning toward her — "let *me* trot you about a bit, eh? You'll maybe see more than enough of *him* by and by!" He indicated Slyne with an eloquent elbow, and further expressed his sentiments by means of an ardent sigh.

Beyond the blossom-laden épergne, Mr. Jobling and Captain Dove, almost cut off from other intercourse by that barrier, were exchanging coldly critical glances. Neither seemed to be quite at his ease with the other, and both had, of course, a great many urgent questions to put to Slyne as soon as the Marquis of Ingoldsby should be gone. So that the luncheon-party must have proved a very dull affair to them, and they were no doubt glad when it was over.

Slyne signalled to Sallie as soon as coffee was served, and she rose to leave the room. She was quite accustomed to being promptly dispensed with whenever her company might have been inconvenient.

"Oh, I say!" protested Lord Ingoldsby. "You're not goin' yet, Lady J. Half a mo'. Won't you come for a spin with me now that the car's mine? Just say the word and I'll drop my other engagement. And then we could dine at — "

"Lady Josceline will be engaged with her lawyer all afternoon," Slyne cut him short with the utmost coolness, "and she's leaving Monte Carlo again to-night."

The Marquis of Ingoldsby glowered at him.

"I'll see you in Paris, then, Lady J.," he went on, pointedly ignoring Slyne, "or in London, at least, later on. Well, good-bye — if you must be goin'."

He bowed her out of the room, and then, snatching up

his hat and cane with very visible annoyance, included the others in a curt nod of farewell and made off himself.

He passed her before she had closed her own door — and would gladly have paused there.

"You won't forget me, will you?" she heard him ask eagerly from behind her. But she did not delay to answer that question.

A few minutes later, Slyne knocked at her door and entered, followed by the other two men. He had brought with him the papers which Mr. Jobling had prepared. Mr. Jobling carried an inkstand, and Captain Dove a decanter of brandy. Slyne seated himself at the table and waved Sallie back to her chair by the window.

"We're going to talk business for a few minutes," he told her, "and then get everything settled in writing — to keep you safe.

"Fire ahead now, Dove. You want to know — "

"Is Sallie really — "

"*I* don't know anyone of that name now. D'you mean Lady Josceline?"

Captain Dove glared at him, and then at the lawyer, and then at Sallie herself.

"Is that really who I am now, Jasper?" she asked, a most wistful inflection in her low voice.

"You needn't believe *me*," he answered her. "Ask Mr. Jobling. He'll tell you."

Mr. Jobling coughed importantly. "I'll tell you all I know myself, Lady Josceline," he promised her, and proceeded to repeat in part what he had told Slyne on the terrace the night before concerning the Jura family, but without a single word of the fortune awaiting the

next of kin. Captain Dove's face expressed the extreme of astonishment as he too sat listening with the closest attention.

"That's as far as my present knowledge goes," the lawyer finished blandly. "And now — I understand that Captain Dove is prepared to supply the proof required in conclusion.

"How long have you known Lady Josceline, Captain Dove?"

Captain Dove frowned as if in deep thought, and Slyne looked very crossly at him.

"About three quarters of an hour," the old man answered, and, glancing at Slyne, chuckled hoarsely. "She's only been Lady Josceline for so long."

Mr. Jobling nodded understanding and the creases on his fleshy forehead disappeared again.

"And before that — ?" he suggested, politely patient.

"Before that she was — what she still is so far's I'm concerned — Saleh Harez, my adopted daughter."

"Sallie — *Harris!*" Mr. Jobling ejaculated. "Dear me! Did you say Sallie — er — Harris?"

"I said Saleh Harez," affirmed Captain Dove, and filled the glass at his elbow again. "But all that concerns you, so far's I can see, is that I've known her ever since she was knee-high to me. I've been a father to her all those years, and she's my adopted daughter. So now, you can take it from me, Mr. Jobson, that I'm the joker, and both bowers too, in this merry little game."

"Which makes it all the more unfortunate for you that you haven't a single penny to stake on your hand," Slyne put in, while the lawyer looked somewhat blankly from one to the other of them. "So — don't waste any more time

bluffing, but tell Jobling how you found Sal—Lady Josceline."

Captain Dove darted a very evil look at his friendly adviser. "And what if I refuse?" he asked.

Slyne almost smiled. "Why cut off your own nose to spite your face?" he returned. "You won't refuse, because it would cost you a hundred thousand dollars to do so."

Captain Dove stroked his chin contemplatively, and his face slowly cleared.

"A hundred and fifty thousand, you mean," he said in a most malevolent tone.

Slyne got up from the table as if in anger, and for some time they two wrangled over that point, the stout solicitor gazing at them with evident dismay, while Sallie awaited the upshot of it all with bated breath. She knew it was over the price to be paid for her that they were disputing, but that knowledge had ceased to be any novelty. The wrathful voices of the two disputants seemed to come from a great distance. She felt as if the whole affair were a dream from which she might at any moment awake on board the *Olive Branch* again.

"There isn't money enough in it to pay you so much for a mere affidavit," she heard Slyne say, and Mr. Jobling, under his glance, confirmed that statement emphatically.

"A hundred and twenty-one thousand is the last limit — a thousand down, to bind the bargain, and the balance the day of my wedding with Sallie," Slyne declared. "If that doesn't satisfy you — there's nothing more to be said. And I'll maybe find other means — "

"Show me even the first thousand," requested Captain

Dove, and Slyne counted out on to the table, at a safe distance from the old man's twitching fingers, five thousand francs of the amount Lord Ingoldsby had paid him for his car.

"All right," said Captain Dove gruffly, and snatched at the notes. But Slyne picked them up again.

"As soon as you've given Jobling your statement," he said, "and signed whatever other documents he may think necessary, I'll hand you these and my note of hand, endorsed by him, for the balance remaining due you."

Mr. Jobling picked up a pen and Slyne pushed a sheet of foolscap toward him. Captain Dove, with a grunt of disgust, sat back in his chair and, while the lawyer wrote rapidly, related how he had found Sallie.

When he had finished, Mr. Jobling read his statement over aloud, and chuckled ecstatically. His own eyes were shining.

"That settles it, Lady Josceline," said he triumphantly, turning to Sallie. "I'll stake my professional reputation on your identity now. You need have no further doubt — "

"And just to clinch the matter," growled Captain Dove, "you'd better add this to your affidavy: — The clothes the kid was wearing when I fetched her off that dhow were all marked with the moniker 'J. J.' and some sort of crest. But — they were all lost when the ship I commanded then was — went down at sea."

Mr. Jobling groaned. "How *very* unfortunate!" he remarked before he resumed his writing. And Slyne stared fixedly at the old man until the lawyer had finished.

"Now," said Mr. Jobling, adjusting his pince-nez and beaming about him again, "we can call in a couple of witnesses and — ".

" We'll witness each other's signatures." Slyne disagreed. "Better not bring in any outsiders."

The stout solicitor frowned over that, but finally nodded concurrence. And Captain Dove took the pen from him, only to hand it to Slyne.

" Gimme my thousand dollars and your joint note for the balance first," he requested unamiably.

Slyne signed the new note Mr. Jobling pushed across the table, and Mr. Jobling endorsed it. Captain Dove read it over carefully before he pocketed it, and also counted with great caution the bills Slyne tossed to him. Then he in his turn signed, without reading it, the statement the lawyer had drawn up from his dictation, and the more lengthy agreement between Sallie and Jasper Slyne.

Slyne and Jobling added their names to that, and Slyne attached his careful signature to a promise to pay the solicitor the percentage agreed upon. Captain Dove witnessed it and then called Sallie from her seat in the window-alcove, and she came forward with anxious eyes, to fulfil the undertaking she had finally had to give Jasper Slyne as the price of his help in her most unhappy predicament.

She did not know — nor did she greatly care then — what was contained in the contract he laid before her without a word. She took from him without demur the pen he held out to her. She had promised to do all he told her and give him whatever he asked — except, for the present, herself.

" Sign ' Josceline Justice ' at the foot of each page," he said gently, and she did so without a word. For she would not for all the world contained have broken any promise she had given. Then Mr. Jobling desired her to witness the two other men's signatures.

As she handed him back the pen she had a final question to ask him.

" You said my father and mother are both dead, and my step-brother too. Is there no one else — "

" No one you need worry about in the least," he assured her, misunderstanding. " There was a beggarly American who lodged a claim to the title and — to the title; his name was Carthew, I think — yes, Justin Carthew. But even if I — if he hadn't gone and got lost while looking for you, his claim would be quite ineffectual now. You're your father's daughter, Lady Josceline. Justin Carthew was a dozen or more degrees removed from the trunk of your family tree. He had only the faintest tinge of blue blood in his veins. He was an absolute outsider. We'll hear no more about *him* now."

" You mean that it's an absolutely sure thing for her," Captain Dove suggested, and Mr. Jobling looked pained.

" I can't afford to risk anything on uncertainties, sir," he answered stiffly. " And I'll stake my professional reputation on — "

" Oh, never mind about all that," Slyne broke in, folding his share of the papers together and pocketing them. " The syndicate's safely floated. And now — as to our next move.

" You'd better get away back to Genoa by the five o'clock train, Dove. And you must take Ambrizette with you; I'll get Sal— Lady Josceline another maid in Paris — one who won't attract quite so much attention to us as that damned dwarf would.

" Jobling and I will go on there by the night-mail, on our way to London with — Lady Josceline. You can take the *Olive Branch* round to some safe English port and lay her up there in the meantime. As soon as you land, you can

rejoin us — at Jobling's address. By that time we'll probably be ready to redeem our note to you."

"By that time," Captain Dove returned with concentrated bitterness, "you'll have found some way to give me the slip altogether. D'ye take me for a blind idiot, Slyne? D'ye think I'm going to let Sallie out of my sight, with you?"

Slyne was visibly disconcerted. "But — aren't you going to take your ship round to England?" he asked, in genuine surprise. "You can't very well leave her lying in Genoa!"

"I'll attend to my own end of the business," said Captain Dove with angry decision. "If you're going to London by train to-night, so am I. If you like to come back on board with me, I'll sail you round. But I'm not the only man on the *Olive Branch* who can sail a ship. Why, I've half a dozen broken captains — and most of 'em with extra masters' certificates, too — among my crew.

"I've left Brasse and Da Costa in charge, and they'll work her across the Bay if I tell them to. I've only to send them a wire. And all you have to do now is to say which way you want to travel — with me; for I'm going to stick to you like a leech till the day you pay me off."

Slyne walked to the window, humming a tune. But it was obviously costing him all of his refreshed fortitude to refrain from expressing his real sentiments toward Captain Dove. His face, as he stood glaring blindly out at the beautiful scene before him, was like that of a wild beast balked of its fair prey. But from between his bared, set teeth the careless hum came unbroken.

"I think you're foolish," was all he said when he turned again, convinced that it would be a waste of time to argue

the matter with the old man, " but — suit yourself. Jobling and I *must* get to London with Sal— Lady Josceline at the earliest possible moment. If you insist on travelling with us to-night — so be it. All I want you to understand is that there's to be no more drinking, and that you must be advised by me in every other particular. This isn't really the sort of game you're liable to shine in. It would be far better for all of us if you'd stay on board your ship."

Captain Dove's weather-beaten countenance was turning slowly purple. He was striving after speech. Slyne, outwardly cool and contemptuous of his visible fury, stood gazing down at him, hands in pockets. Mr. Jobling was wriggling restlessly in his chair, glancing from one to the other, prepared to flee from the coming storm.

Still without a word, Captain Dove reached again for the brandy-decanter, directly defying Slyne. Slyne stepped forward and snatched it out of his hand.

Simultaneously, the old man and Mr. Jobling sprang from their seats, the former making for Slyne and the latter for the door, which opened just as he reached it, so that he all but fell over a boy in buttons who had knocked and entered carrying a telegram on a tray.

Slyne had not moved. Captain Dove, almost at his throat, spun round on one heel.

" For me? " Mr. Jobling exclaimed anxiously as he ripped the envelope open. And a slow pallor overspread his puffy pink features while he was perusing its contents.

" From Mullins, my managing clerk," he mumbled as he passed the message to Slyne, who looked it over indifferently, and then re-read it aloud in a low but very ominous voice: " ' *American claimant landed at Genoa yesterday. Now on way to London. Court granted decree in his*

favour.' Handed in at Chancery Lane, in London," — he pulled out his watch — " fifty minutes ago."

The page-boy had disappeared. Slyne pushed suddenly past Mr. Jobling and set his back against the door. Captain Dove was approaching the terrified solicitor softly, on tip-toe, his fists clenched, all his tobacco-stained fangs displayed in a grin of fury. One of his long arms shot out just as the door opened behind Slyne's back and a voice announced :

" M. Dubois."

CHAPTER XV

THE LAW — AND THE PROFITS

SALLIE saw how Jasper Slyne's face blanched at sight of that very untimely intruder, whose keen eyes seemed to take in the situation there at a glance.

Mr. Jobling had fallen backward into a convenient arm-chair and, with both hands clapped to his nose, was moaning most piteously. Captain Dove was standing over him, with features inflamed, in a very bellicose posture and glaring at the new-comer, toward whom Slyne had turned inquiringly.

"You're — looking for some one, M. Dubois?" Slyne asked, in a tone of polite surprise, which, Sallie knew, was assumed.

"A thousand pardons," returned that individual. "I am indeed looking for some one — whom I thought to find here. I had no intention, however, of intruding upon a lady — " He bowed profusely to Sallie. "It may be," he suggested, "that I have mistaken the number. Is not this the suite 161?"

"One hundred and sixty," Slyne told him, and evidently did not think it worth while to add that the next suite was his own.

"A thousand pardons," repeated M. Dubois, very penitently. "I am too stupid! But mademoiselle will perhaps be so gracious as to forgive me this time."

He bowed to Sallie again and to Slyne, and disappeared, sharply scanning the latter's face to the last.

"Who's that son of a sea-cook?" snapped Captain Dove, and Mr. Jobling looked wanly up out of one eye.

"A French detective," Slyne answered reflectively. But Sallie felt sure that he was afraid of M. Dubois, and wondered why.

"Well, he has nothing against me that I'm aware of," the old man declared. "And now — what about this wire? Does it mean that some other fellow has scooped the pool — and that I've had all my trouble for nothing, eh?" He clenched his fist again and shook it in the lawyer's face.

"No, no," gasped Mr. Jobling. "Don't be so hasty. It makes no difference at all, now that we have Lady Josceline with us. I told you that the American, Carthew, is of no account against her — and how he has ever cropped up again I can't conceive. In any case —"

"In any case, you'd better be off to your room and ring for a bit of beefsteak to doctor that eye with," Slyne interposed in a tone of intense annoyance.

"And I wish to goodness, Dove!" he added savagely, "that you would behave a little more like a reasonable human being and less —"

"Less of your lip, now!" snarled the old man. "And *don't* keep on saying that. Just take it from me again, both of you, that you'd better not be so slow again in telling me —"

"You didn't give me time," Mr. Jobling protested.

Slyne opened the door. "Come on," he urged. "You've got to get your kit packed, Jobling. We'll be leaving before very long now.

"Have you made up your mind to come with us, Dove?"

Captain Dove nodded, most emphatically. "I'll send word to Brasse and Da Costa at once," he remarked, "and then I'll be ready to start whenever you are."

He left the room after Mr. Jobling, and Slyne, in the doorway, looked back at Sallie, the reassuring smile on his lips belied by his cold, calculating eyes.

"And how about you, Sallie?" he asked. "Have you made up your mind? Are you satisfied — so far? Or — would you rather go back to the *Olive Branch?*

"If you would — I'll let you off your promise, even now! And don't forget that this will be your last chance to recall it."

"You know I can't go back to the *Olive Branch,* Jasper," she answered slowly. "But — "

He did not give her time to say more. "That's settled for good, then," he asserted. "Your promise stands, and I know you'll keep it when the time comes — after I've done my part.

"I'm only sorry I haven't been able to get rid of Captain Dove right away, but it won't be long now till — You needn't worry any more about him. I'll see that he behaves better.

"If there's anything else I can do for your comfort, you must let me know. And now, I'll leave you to your own devices until it's time to start on our travels. Better get a rest while you can, eh? We've a very busy week ahead of us."

She saw that he did not intend to tell her any more in the meantime, and was glad to see him go. Then she called Ambrizette in for company, and sat down by the window again, to try to sort out for herself the bewildering tangle that life had once more become within a few hours.

Gazing out across the familiar sea with wistful, far-away eyes, she mused for a time over what Captain Dove had told Mr. Jobling of her history, and strove to piece together with that all she herself could recall of that dim and always more mysterious past out of which she had come to be Captain Dove's property, bought and paid for, at a high price, as he had repeated several times.

Her own earliest vague, disconnected, ineffectual memories were all of some dark, savage mountain-country; of endless days of travel; of camp-fires in the cold, and hungry camels squealing for fodder; of the fragrant cinnamon-smell of the steam that came from the cooking-pots.

Before, or, it might have been, after that, she had surely lived on some seashore, in a shimmering white village with narrow, crooked lanes for streets and little flat-roofed houses huddled together among hot sandhills where the *suddra* grew and lean goats bleated always for their kids.

Then, as if in a very vexing dream, she could almost but never quite see, through the thickening mist of the years, once-familiar faces — white men, with swords, in ragged uniforms, and big brown ones with wicked eyes and long, thin guns, glaring down at her over a high wall, through smoke and fire, and fighting, and the acrid reek of powder. . . .

And there remembrance grew blank altogether, until it connected with Captain Dove, on the deck of a slaving-dhow far out of sight of any land. She had been only a little child when he had carried her up the side of his own ship in his arms, while she laughed gleefully in his face and pulled at his shaggy moustache, but she could still remember some of the incidents of that day.

She had lived on board his successive ships ever since.

And ever since, until recently, he had always been very good to her, in his own queer, gruff way. He had always treated her as though she were a child of his own, shielding her, in so far as he could, from even the knowledge of all the evil which he had done up and down the world. She had grown up in the belief that his despotic guardianship was altogether for her good and not to be disputed.

But now — she was no longer a child. And all her old, unquestioning faith in his inherent good intentions, toward her at least, was finally shattered. She knew now that he really looked upon her as a mere chattel, with a cash value — just as if she had been one of the hapless cargo of human cattle confined in the pestiferous hold of the dhow on whose deck he had found her at play. She knew now that he had bought and paid for them as well as her, and sold them again at a fat profit, far across the seas — all but the dumb, deformed black woman whom he had picked from among them to act as her nurse.

And if it did not occur to her to question either his power or his perfect right to dispose of her future also as he might see fit, had not all her experience gone to prove that might is right everywhere, that law and justice are merely additional pretexts devised by the strong for oppressing the weak? She had had to choose between remaining on board the *Olive Branch*, or paying Jasper Slyne his price for the chance of escape he had offered her in pursuance of his own aims.

She disliked and distrusted Slyne scarcely less than before. But she did not see how she could have chosen otherwise. And, in any case, — it was too late now to revoke the promise she had made him.

She was still afraid to place any faith in the promises

he had made her. She had no idea how he had come at his alleged discovery of her real identity. But Mr. Jobling's obvious belief in that recurred to her mind, and she fell to wondering timidly what life would be like as Lady Josceline Justice.

Her impressions on that point were very hazy, however, and she had still to puzzle out the problem added by Justin Carthew. But she finally gave up the attempt to solve that at the moment, contenting herself with the tremulous hope that she might soon be on her way toward that dear, unknown, dream-home for which her hungry heart had so often ached.

Of the exorbitant price so soon to be paid for the brief glimpse of happiness Slyne had agreed to allow her, she took no further thought at all. She had already made up her mind to meet that without complaint.

An hour or more later, when Slyne looked in to tell her that it was time to start, she was still seated at the window, gazing out over the steel-grey sea with wistful, far-away eyes.

At his instigation she veiled herself very closely. And he had brought with him a hooded cloak for Ambrizette. No one took any particular notice of the inconspicuous party which presently left the Hôtel de Paris in a hired car, as if for an excursion along the coast.

At a station fifty miles away they left the car and caught the night-mail for Paris. Slyne's baggage was on board it, in the care of a sullen chauffeur, and there were also berths reserved for them all.

" Did you see any more of Dubois? " Sallie heard Slyne ask the man, who shook his head indifferently in reply.

The long night-journey passed without other incident

than a dispute between Captain Dove and the sleeping-car attendant, which raged until Slyne threatened to have the train stopped at the next station and send for the police. And the sun was shining brightly when they reached Paris.

Mr. Jobling went straight on to London, but Slyne took Sallie and Captain Dove to a quiet but expensive hotel, where they remained for a few days, which passed in a perfect whirl of novelty and excitement for her. And when they in their turn crossed the Channel, she had for baggage at least a dozen new trunks containing the choicest spoils of the Rue de la Paix. Slyne had pooh-poohed all her timid protests against his lavish expenditure on her account, and had also provided for Captain Dove and Ambrizette in their degree. He had evidently a fortune at his disposal, and was bent on showing her how generous he could be.

He was also unostentatiously displaying other good qualities which had all gone to make those days pass very pleasantly for her. She could not fail to appreciate the courtesy and consideration which he consistently showed her now. His patience with Captain Dove, a trying companion at the best of times and doubly troublesome idle, more than once made her wonder whether he could be the same Jasper Slyne she had known on the *Olive Branch*. Prosperity seemed to have improved him almost beyond recognition.

He had a cabin at her disposal on the Calais-Dover steamer but she stayed on deck throughout the brief passage, glad to breathe the salt sea-air again, while he entertained her with descriptions of London and she watched the twinkling lights that were guiding her home.

And then came London itself, at last, somewhat grey, and cold, and disconsolate-looking on a wet winter morning.

But after breakfast in a cosy suite at the Savoy, a blink

of sunshine along the Embankment helped to better that first hasty impression. And then Slyne took Captain Dove and her in a taxicab along the thronged and bustling Strand to Mr. Jobling's office in Chancery Lane.

They got out in front of a dingy building not very far from Cursitor Street. It was raining again, and Sallie, looking up and down the narrow, turbid thoroughfare, felt glad that she did not need to live there.

Indoors, the atmosphere was scarcely less depressing. A dismal passage led toward a dark stairway, up which they had to climb flight after flight to reach at last a dusty, ill-smelling, gas-lighted room, inhabited only by a shabby, shock-headed hobbledehoy of uncertain age and unprepossessing appearance, perched on a preposterously high stool at a still higher desk, behind a cage-like partition.

"I want to see Mr. Jobling, at once," Slyne announced to him. And Mr. Jobling's "managing clerk" looked slowly round, with a snake-like and disconcerting effect due to a very long neck and a very low collar.

"Show Mr. Slyne in immediately, Mullins," ordered a pompous voice from within; and Mr. Jobling himself, a blackcoated, portly, important personage there, came bustling out from his private office to welcome his visitors.

"How d'ye do, how d'ye do, Lady Josceline!" he exclaimed, and cocked an arch eyebrow at Sallie's most becoming costume; although the effect he intended was somewhat impaired by the fact that he was still suffering from a black eye, painted over in haste — and by an incompetent artist.

"I can see now what's been keeping *you* in Paris!" he added facetiously, and, having shaken hands with Slyne,

who seemed to think that superfluous, turned to receive Captain Dove with the same politeness.

" Phew! " whistled Mr. Jobling and drew back and stared at the old man. " I'd *never* have recognised you in that rig-out."

Captain Dove pulled off a pair of smoked glasses he had been wearing, the better to look him, with offensive intent, in his injured eye. For Captain Dove was still enduring much mental as well as physical discomfort in a disguise which he had only been induced to adopt a couple of days before, and after an embittered quarrel with Slyne. The stiff white collar round his corded neck was still threatening to choke him and then cut his throat. He had been infinitely more at his ease in his scanty, short-tailed frock-coat and furry top-hat than he was in the somewhat baggy if more becoming black garb he had donned in its place, with a soft wide-awake always flapping about his ears.

" Come inside," Mr. Jobling begged hurriedly, and, looking round as he followed them into his sanctum, " Mullins! " he snapped, " don't stand there staring. Get on with your work, at once.

" You're later than I expected," he remarked to Slyne as he closed the door, " but just in time. The Court's closed, of course, for the Christmas vacation, but I've filed an application for a hearing in Chambers, and — "

He paused as a telephone-bell rang shrilly outside, and a moment later the shock head of his " managing clerk " protruded into the room, almost as if it did not belong to a body at all.

" Mr. Spettigrew says that our application in Chambers will be heard by Mr. Justice Gaunt, in 57B, at eleven-thirty

sharp this forenoon," announced that youth and, with a final wriggle of his long neck, withdrew.

"Devil take him!" exclaimed Captain Dove, somewhat startled and much incensed. "I wouldn't keep a crested cobra like that about me for — "

"Let's see those accounts of yours, now," said Slyne, disregarding that interruption, and Mr. Jobling, having first looked at his watch, produced from another drawer a great sheaf of papers, all carefully docketed. He slipped off the top one and somewhat reluctantly handed that to his friend.

Slyne took it from him eagerly, and sat for a time gloating over it with eyes which presently began to glow.

But when Captain Dove, growing restless, would have glanced over his shoulder to see what was tickling his fancy so, he frowned and folded that document up and returned it to Mr. Jobling.

"Give it here, now!" growled Captain Dove, menacing Mr. Jobling with a clenched fist; and the lawyer, after an appealing, impotent glance at Slyne, had no recourse but to comply with that peremptory order.

"Are you quite sure of your figures?" Slyne asked, with a scowl. He seemed conscious that he, in his haste, had made a false step. And Mr. Jobling nodded with nervous assurance.

"I have inside sources of information as to the revenue of the estates," he replied, "and a note of all the investments. I've allowed a wide margin for all sorts of incidentals. I think you'll find, in fact, that Lady Josceline's inheritance will amount to even more than I've estimated."

Slyne smiled again, more contentedly. Nor was his complaisance overcome even when Mr. Jobling put to him

a half-whispered petition for a further small cash advance to account of expenses.

"I wasn't even able to pay Mullins' wages with what you gave me in Paris," said the stout solicitor vexedly. "Fees and so on swallowed it all up, and — I'm actually short of cab-fares!"

"Why don't you fire Mullins, then?" demanded Slyne with a shade of impatience. "I've just got rid of my chauffeur because he was costing me more than he was worth."

"But I can't afford to get rid of Mullins. Just at the moment he's very useful to me. It would create a bad impression if I had to run my own errands. And — the fact is, he knows far too much. I'll pay him off and shut his mouth by and by, when I have more time to attend to such matters."

"How much do you want?" Slyne inquired with a frown evidently meant to warn his friend to be modest.

"Can you spare twenty pounds — to go on with?"

Slyne hesitated, but only for a few seconds. Then he pulled out a pocket-book and surreptitiously passed that sum to the penniless man of law, who accepted it with no more than a nod of thanks.

"I'll pay Mullins now," he remarked, and immediately hurried out of the room. Captain Dove was gasping for breath and showed every other symptom of a forthcoming explosion.

As soon as the door shut behind him, the old man gave open vent to his wrath. And a most furious quarrel followed between Slyne and him. Sallie, too, learned then, for the first time, of the vast inheritance which would be hers, of Slyne's cunning plan to buy Captain Dove out for a mere

pittance, and how he himself expected to profit through marrying her.

But she was not overwhelmed with surprise by that belated discovery. She had almost anticipated the final disclosure of some such latent motive behind all Slyne's professions to her. The only difference it might make would be to Captain Dove. Slyne and he were still snarling at each other when Mr. Jobling walked jauntily in again. But at sight of him Captain Dove began to subside.

"We mustn't be late. Mr. Spettigrew will be expecting us now. I've sent Mullins on ahead with my papers," observed Mr. Jobling breezily, and went on to explain that Mr. Justice Gaunt, by nature a somewhat cross-grained old limb of the law, had been very ill-pleased over being bothered again, and at a moment when most of his colleagues were enjoying a holiday, about any such apparently endless case as that of the Jura succession, which had been cropping up before him, at more or less lengthy intervals, for quite a number of years, and concerning which he had, only a few days before, made an order of court in favour of Justin Carthew.

Captain Dove clapped his soft felt hat on his head with a very devil-may-care expression.

"Come on, then," said he grimly, and Mr. Jobling was not slow to lead the way. So that they reached Mr. Justice Gaunt's chambers punctually at the hour appointed, and were ushered into his lordship's presence by Mr. Spettigrew, the learned counsel retained by Mr. Jobling on Sallie's behalf, a long, lifeless-looking gentleman in a wig and gown and spectacles. And his lordship smiled very pleasantly as Sallie raised her heavy veil at counsel's crafty request.

"Pray be seated, my dear young lady," his lordship begged with fatherly, old-fashioned kindness, and indicated a chair meant for counsel, much nearer his own than the rest. Nor did he often take his eyes from her face throughout the course of a long and convincing dissertation by Mr. Spettigrew, on her past history, present position in life, and claims on the future, with some reference to the rival claims of Mr. Justin Carthew.

"And I have full proof to place before you, at once, if you wish it, m'lud," concluded Mr. Spettigrew in his most professional drone, "in support of the fact that the lady before you is the lawful daughter of the late earl and the countess, his second wife, who died in the desert. Mr. Justin Carthew, on the other hand, is related to the family in a very different and distant degree, and there are, as y'r ludship has been good enough to agree, no other survivors.

"I beg leave now to request that y'r ludship will rescind the authority granted to Mr. Justin Carthew, and admit my client's petition *ad referendum.*"

"Produce your proofs," ordered his lordship, and Mr. Spettigrew extracted from a capacious black bag a pile of papers at which Mr. Justice Gaunt looked with no little disgust.

"What are they, in chief?" asked Mr. Justice Gaunt, turning over page after page of closely written law-script, as gingerly as if he believed that one might perhaps explode and blow him to pieces. And Mr. Spettigrew launched forth again into a long list of certificates, records, researches, findings, orders of court, sworn statements and affidavits, by Captain Dove — "Then trading in his own ship, m'lud, now retired and devoting his time to mission-work among deep-sea sailors;" by Mr. Jasper Slyne, gentleman; by

Mr. Jobling, whom he did not pause to describe; by a couple of dozen other people, living or dead, at home or abroad; all in due legal form and not to be controverted.

"I think you'll find them in perfect order, and absolutely conclusive, m'lud," counsel came to a finish triumphantly, and sat down, greatly to the relief of all present.

"H'm!" said his lordship, still gravely regarding Sallie: whose eyes had nothing to conceal from him. "And so this is the long-lost Lady Josceline!"

His searching glance travelled slowly to Captain Dove's face, and then to Slyne's; both of whom met it without winking, although Captain Dove was no doubt glad of the protection of his smoked glasses.

"I'll have to go through the proofs, of course," said his lordship reflectively and let his gaze rest on Sallie again. "But — if everything's as you say, I don't think it will be long before Lady Josceline finds herself in full enjoyment of all her rights and privileges. If everything's as you say, I'll do whatever lies in my power to expedite matters; I think I can promise you that the case will be called immediately the vacation is over. Meanwhile, however, and till I have looked through the proofs, I can make no further order."

He rose, and they also got up from their chairs as he came round from behind his desk and confronted Sallie, a tall, stooping old man with a wrinkled face and tired but kindly eyes.

She looked up into them frankly, and he laid a hand on her shoulder.

"Yours has been a very sad history so far, my dear young lady," he said, his head on one side, still studying her. "I hope it will be all the brighter henceforth. I knew

— the last Earl of Jura — when we were both young men — before he married. You remind me of him, as he was then, in many respects. Good day to you now; my time here is not my own, you know. But some day, perhaps you will allow me to pay my respects to you — at Justice-hall, since we're to be neighbours; my own home isn't very far from yours."

Outside in the corridor, Mr. Jobling shook hands rapturously with every one, even with Captain Dove.

"We've turned the trick already," he declared. "You heard what his lordship said. With him on our side, the whole thing's as good as settled. All we have to do now is to wait until the Courts take up again and confirm — "

"How long will that be? " Slyne inquired. He, too, was smiling ecstatically.

"Not much more than a fortnight," the lawyer informed him. "It will soon pass. We must just be patient."

"We must keep very quiet, too," said Slyne, "unless we want to give the whole show away to the enemy in advance. We must clear off out of London till then. I'll tell you what, Jobling! Why shouldn't we all go down to Scotland to-night? "

Mr. Jobling nodded agreement. "An excellent idea," he declared. "There's nothing to keep us here."

"That's settled, then," Slyne asserted. "And we'll all dine together at the Savoy before we start. I think we can afford to celebrate the occasion, eh! And I want to show Lady Josceline a few of her future friends."

CHAPTER XVI

"PLEASURES AND PALACES"

THE Duchess of Dawn was dining a number of notabilities at the Savoy, on her way to a command performance at the Gaiety; a fact of which the fashionable world was well aware, because the young duchess is a great lady in London as well as elsewhere, and all her doings are chronicled in advance. The fashionable world had promptly decided to dine there too, and telephoned in breathless haste for tables. It filled the restaurant at an unusually early hour, and a disappointed overflow displayed itself in the *foyer*.

The Duchess of Dawn is one of the most beautiful women in England. The eyes of the fashionable world were focussed on her and her guests, among whom were a minor European prince and a famous field-marshal who had not been on show in London for long, until there appeared from the crowded *foyer*, upon the arm of an old-young man of distinguished appearance and faultless *tenue*, a tall, slender girl, at whom, as she passed, every one turned to gaze, with undisguised admiration or envy, according to sex and temperament.

She was gowned to distraction, and by an artist in women's wear. Her beautiful bare arms and shoulders and bosom were free of superfluous ornament. Her pure, proud, sensitive features were faintly flushed, — as though, if

that were conceivable, she was wearing evening dress for the first time, and found it trying, — but her curved crimson lips were slightly parted in a most bewitching smile, and, from under their drooping lashes, her radiant eyes looked a demure, amused, impersonal defiance at the frankly curious faces upturned toward her. The shaded lights made most enchanting lights and shadows among her hair, red-gold and heaped about her head in heavy coils, as she moved modestly through the thronged room toward a corner where, about a beautifully decorated table, four motionless waiters were standing guard over four empty chairs.

She sat down there, her back to the bulk of the company, and her escort took the seat opposite. A portly, prosperous-looking, elderly man, with something a little suspicious about one of his eyes, and a squat, queerly-shaped old fellow in semi-clerical garb and wearing smoked glasses, completed the party. Their waiters began to hover about them, and the fashionable world went on with its dinner.

" Who was that *lovely* girl? " the Duchess of Dawn demanded of her *vis-à-vis*, the veteran soldier, and he, reputed among women to have no heart at all, recalled himself with an evident start from the reverie into which he had fallen. He almost blushed, indeed, under the duchess's blandly discerning smile.

" I don't know, I'm sure, duchess," he returned, smiling also, in spite of himself, and beckoned to a servant behind him, whom he despatched on some errand.

" She's registered as Miss Harris, your lordship," the man announced in an undertone when he returned.

" Miss Harris! " echoed the prince, who was also a soldier. He had overheard. And, as he in turn caught the

duchess's eyes, he lay back laughing, a little ruefully. But the man opposite him, the master of armies, was not amused.

"I'd like to know who and what those three fellows with Miss Harris may be," said he.

At their table in the corner, they seemed to be thoroughly enjoying themselves. The three men were toasting Sallie and each other with equal good-will. And even Sallie had dismissed from her mind the last of her lingering doubts as to the reality and endurance of her part in that most amazing new life, had put the past with all its horrors resolutely behind her, was too much interested in the entertaining present to trouble about the future at the moment.

Captain Dove had seemingly forgotten, for the time being at any rate, his grievance against Slyne, and was in his most lamb-like mood. While Slyne did not even demur against the quantities of expensive wine the old man consumed during dinner. Mr. Jobling, too, was displaying symptoms of convivial hilarity when they at length left the restaurant. But most of the other tables were empty by then.

Mr. Jobling and Captain Dove, arm in arm, affectionately maintained each other as far as their sitting-room, while Slyne accompanied Sallie to her own door. He had been making himself most agreeable to her, and had pointed out a number of the notorieties and one or two of the celebrities present; although it had somewhat startled her to be told that she would very soon be on familiar terms with them all.

"Aren't you glad now that you agreed to the bargain we made on the *Olive Branch* — and in Monte Carlo?" he asked by the way. He was smiling gaily.

She smiled back at him, and, " I'm not sorry — so far, Jasper," she answered, looking deep into his eyes.

He nodded, as if quite satisfied, and turned away to escape that embarrassing scrutiny.

" We'll be starting in half an hour or so," he informed her from a safe distance, and, " I'll be all ready," she called cheerfully after him.

A little before eleven he came in again and they all set out for the station to catch their train.

It was a cold, clear, frosty night, and the Strand was at its busiest as Sallie looked out at it from the taxi into which Slyne and Ambrizette had followed her at the hotel portico. Another, containing Captain Dove and their legal adviser, still on the most amicable terms, although Captain Dove as a rule could not stand anyone afflicted with hiccough, crawled close behind them through the turmoil until, at the Gaiety corner, a policeman delayed it to let the cross-traffic through.

A crowd had gathered there to gaze at the royalties who would presently be coming out of the theatre. Slyne drew Sallie back from the open window at sight of two men, one of whom seemed all shirt-front, looking down at the congested street from the empty steps of the principal entrance.

" That ass Ingoldsby! " he explained to Sallie, and was evidently a good deal disturbed. " And — Dubois, as well," he added. " I thought I had shaken him off in Paris. I'm sure he saw me, too."

A little farther on he stopped the taxi and beckoned to one of those street-arabs who make a living about the kerb.

" Go to the gentleman with the beard, on the steps of the Gaiety," he instructed that very alert messenger, " and say to him that a friend wants a word with him here."

Sallie observed the suppressed grimace of surprise on the face of the individual who almost at once arrived in the wake of his ragged Mercury: and Slyne, having tossed the latter a shilling, held out his hand to M. Dubois.

"Charmed to see you in London, *mon confrère*," said he. "Have you yet discovered your man?"

"I am hard at his heels," the detective answered, his eyes searching Slyne's as if, Sallie thought, for some sign that that shaft had hit home.

But Slyne's expression was one of ingenuous simplicity. He bowed, as if with deep respect.

"I caught a glimpse of some one most amazingly like myself, one day on the Faubourg St. Honoré, as I was passing through Paris," he mentioned reflectively.

"Thanks," returned Dubois. "It was he, no doubt. And — he's in London now."

Slyne did not wince, even at that.

"He was dining at the Savoy to-night," said Dubois indifferently. "How does your own affair progress?"

"*Assez bien*," Slyne answered in an even voice. "I have followed my quarry home and am awaiting developments."

"You will be in London for a little, then?"

"For the next week or ten days, I expect," Slyne lied with perfect aplomb.

"We shall meet again, in that case," declared the detective, glancing at Sallie; and, "*Au plaisir de vous revoir, monsieur*," Slyne returned deferentially.

"To Grosvenor Square now — and hurry along," he directed the driver in a voice his enemy could not fail to hear. And the taxicab swung into Drury Lane, on its way west.

For a few minutes he sat silent, with bent head, biting at his moustache. Then he looked round at Sallie.

" That fellow takes me for another man," he told her querulously. " He's been dogging me ever since he first saw me at Monte Carlo. You've no idea, Sallie, what a dangerous risk I had to run there — for your sake."

" You haven't told me much about — anything, Jasper," she reminded him. And he proceeded to describe in lurid detail the fate which would undoubtedly have befallen him had M. Dubois been able then to fasten on him responsibility for the misdeeds of that criminal whom he so unfortunately resembled.

Sallie listened in silence. She had been wondering whether M. Dubois could be in any way concerned with her affairs. She gathered that he was interested only in Slyne. The latter's story of grave risk run for her sake fell somewhat flat, since it seemed to rest on the mere possibility of his having been mistaken for somebody else. She could scarcely believe that his fear of M. Dubois had no other foundation. She even ventured to suggest that he could easily have proved the detective in the wrong.

" He wouldn't have paid the slightest attention to anything I could say," Slyne assured her tartly. " He wouldn't have asked any questions or listened to any statement of mine. You don't know anything about the outrages that are committed every day by fellows like that on men like myself who have no fixed residence, Sallie; and no powerful friends to whom to appeal against such infernal injustice. I can't tell you how thankful I'll be, on your account as well as my own, when we're married and safely settled down, with a home of our own to feel safe in!

" Look, there's where we'll live when we're in London."

Sallie looked out. They were whirling past one of the most imposing houses in Grosvenor Square. "Is it an hotel?" she asked, and observed that all but one or two of its topmost windows were dark.

"It's the Earl of Jura's town house," said Slyne, apparently somewhat piqued by her seeming indifference. "It's yours now — or will be as soon as the Chancery Court wakes up again."

Sallie glanced back and caught another glimpse of it as the taxicab slowed again to take the corner of the square. Slyne had picked up the speaking-tube.

"Get us to the station now, as fast as you can," he told the driver: and then, having glanced at his watch, lighted a cigarette. He seemed to have no more to say at the moment, and Sallie was busy with thoughts of her own. She was wondering whether Justin Carthew could be living in that great house. She could not understand. . . . But she did not dare to ask Jasper Slyne for any information, since he had shown her more than once already that he did not intend to tell her any more than he thought fit.

When they finally reached the station they found Mr. Jobling awaiting them there and very anxious over their late arrival.

"We drove round by Grosvenor Square," Slyne told the lawyer nonchalantly. "And — we're in lots of time."

Mr. Jobling looked cross. "Five minutes more would have lost you the train," he remarked somewhat sourly. "And where would Captain Dove and I have been then!"

As it was, however, they found Captain Dove in his berth, sound asleep, although still fully dressed. And, as Slyne ushered Sallie into the double compartment reserved for her and Ambrizette, "Don't go to bed just yet," he begged.

"I want to show you something by and by. You'll have lots of time for a long sleep before we arrive."

"All right, Jasper," she agreed. "I'll wait up till you come for me."

When he at length knocked at her door again, Mr. Jobling was still with her. She came out between them into the narrow corridor. Slyne rubbed clear one steamy window to let her see the wintry landscape through which they were travelling at express speed. And Sallie looked out delighted, at the sleeping English countryside as its broad grass-lands and bare brown acres, coverts and coppices, hedgerows and lanes, with here and there a grange or a group of cottages, all still and silent, flashed into sight and so disappeared; until, overlooking them all from a knoll on the near bank of a broad, winding river, there loomed up a most magnificent mansion, embedded, in lordly seclusion, among many gnarled and age-old oaks, with gardens terrace on terrace about it, tall fountains among their empty flower-beds, a moss-grown sun-dial at the edge of a quiet, silver lake.

The moon was shining full on its innumerable windows, so that it seemed to be lighted up from within, although, in reality, all were shuttered and dark. Aloof and very stately it stood on that windless night, an empty palace which came and went in a few moments, wing after wing, with its stabling and courtyards, and still more gardens, all within an endless, ivy-clad encircling wall.

"What place is that?" asked Sallie in an awed tone as soon as the train had rumbled across the bridge.

"That's Justicehall, Lady Josceline, — your English country seat, and one of the finest properties in the Shires," Mr. Jobling informed her before Slyne could speak.

"You'll be living there within a few weeks — and forgetting all your old friends!"

Sallie did not sleep much that night. Her brain was far too busy. She could scarcely believe that less than a week had elapsed since she had stepped ashore from the *Olive Branch.*

Nor could she yet reconcile herself to the fact that her new life must lie amid such scenes as those to which Jasper Slyne had so far introduced her. She had liked Monte Carlo, and Paris, and London as any girl might. The great house in Grosvenor Square she had mistaken for an hotel. But the calmly arrogant grandeur of Justicehall had merely oppressed her. And the idea that she might have to live there did not please her at all. For how could she, a creature of the free air, of sunshine and wind and sea and the world's waste places, be happy immured within that immense edifice, encircled by servants, hemmed in on every side by unaccustomed conventionalities, all as distasteful as new to her. She made up her mind, there and then, that, if she might have any say on that subject, Justicehall should stay empty.

But — would she have any say on that subject, or any other? She did not know. Jasper Slyne had so far told her only so much as he thought fit of what was before her. She lay quite still in her narrow berth, gazing out at the window whose blind she had bidden Ambrizette loose from the catch, a hundred puzzled, helpless questions thronging through her head, till the moon failed her and all was darkness but for the flashes of red or green or yellow light that swept past as the train sped through some wayside station or sleeping town.

Then she too fell asleep at last, and so forgot her difficul-

ties till she awoke again in a new and most wonderful world; a world of gaunt, grey mountains and wide dark moors, white tumbling torrents on hillsides, in deep ravines, forests of stately fir and pine that looked like the masts of ships; a world, moreover, which seemed in some sense familiar and friendly to her.

Day was breaking and Ambrizette was already astir. She had come quietly in and closed the curtains during the night, and was now once more looping them back to let in the first of the sun. Sallie lay for a little longer watching the sunrise warm those enchanted solitudes into a golden semblance of fairy-land.

There was snow on the near mountain-tops that turned from the tint of pigeon-blood rubies to pink, from pink to amber, and so to the purest white. The train was travelling through an extensive plantation of silver birches, amid which a lordly stag, paralysed by its swift approach, stood starkly at bay with a timid hind at its heels. A myriad rabbits were diving madly into the bracken on every side. Above in the blue a belated wild-goose was winging its hasty way to some warmer clime; for there was something more than a hint of hard, black frost in the morning air.

Another station swept past, a trim little place with some picturesque cottages perched on the high ground about it. A marvellous vista of water, a long, winding lake in the midst of the mountains, was visible for a few moments, and then Ambrizette brought in tea.

Twenty minutes later, Sallie was up and dressed for the day, in a short-skirted shooting-suit of Harris tweed, heather-proof stockings and smart ankle-boots. When Slyne knocked and she went out to speak to him, he stood for a moment gazing at her with unbounded gratification,

and then, " Gad! Sallie," said he, holding out his hand. " You're her ladyship to the life now. You'll certainly look your part at Loquhariot."

She smiled back at him. He was scarcely less trig than herself in his knickerbockers and Norfolk jacket.

" I hope — It isn't a place like Justicehall, is it, Jasper? " she asked anxiously.

He raised his eyebrows, and laughed, a little surprised.

" Why, scarcely," said he, " from what Jobling tells me. But — didn't you like the look of Justicehall? Well, I hope you won't actually despise Loquhariot, Sallie. ' Be it never so humble,' you know — "

CHAPTER XVII

THE MAN IN POSSESSION

"IS *that* Loquhariot!" asked Sallie.

The weatherly little steamer on which she had been travelling along that wonderful coast since leaving the train had just rounded a high, bluff headland and all at once opened out the wide waters of Loch Jura, mirror-like in the still afternoon among the frowning mountains about them. Mr. Jobling and Slyne were with her on the bridge. Captain Dove strolled up at that moment, his hands in his pockets, his soft felt hat on the back of his head, a cigar cocked between his teeth at an equally rakish angle. Sallie was staring straight ahead, with wide, apprehensive eyes.

"Is *that* Loquhariot!" she asked again, almost in a whisper, as she gazed helplessly at the high battlements of the ancient stronghold which looks from its lofty promontory down the whole length of the loch, unchanged in its seaward face since the date of its building. Even Captain Dove was impressed by the picture it made.

"That's your Castle of Loquhariot, Lady Josceline," Mr. Jobling at length replied, and went on to tell her its history, learned from the guide-book and locally when he had been there before.

The Castle of Loquhariot dates back to the sixteenth century. But for long ere that, a squat, four-square fort-

alice had occupied its site. Legend has it that the grim, grey keep which to-day covers the whole surface of what was then a high rocky island but is now a mere peninsula of the mainland, was first conceived in the mind of the then Lord Jura, a plain Scots baron of piratical tendencies, who had brought back from the Spanish Main — whither he had sailed in the company of another of the same kidney as himself, one Francis Drake — a veritable shipload of doubloons and pieces-of-eight; and that its ramparts had first been armed and manned, in haste, when the remains of the Great Armada came drifting southward from Cape Wrath on its hapless way home to Spain. after that same Francis Drake had done with it.

To-day, at any rate, may be seen in more than one of the embrasures on those ramparts, some culverin or falconet salved from the wreck of a great galleon which went to pieces on the Small Isles, at the mouth of the loch. And in a little graveyard on the smallest of the Small Isles stands a weather-beaten stone which says that round about it lie buried the bones of a great mort of Spaniards there interred by their sworn enemies in August, A. D. 1588.

It must undoubtedly have cost at least a shipload of doubloons to build the castle. But the then baron did not build it all, for there are towers and wings and bastions added, on the landward side, during the next two centuries; whose cost would seem to show that his piratical lordship did not leave his descendants quite penniless. The circular North Keep alone — where the billiard-room is nowadays — must undoubtedly have cost its imaginative progenitor a small fortune.

The whole edifice, as it now stands, is a monument, apparently imperishable, to the greatness and grandeur, past,

present, and to come, of the Jura family. And Sallie, staring at it with wide, apprehensive eyes, from the bridge of the busy little coaster, listening to Mr. Jobling's descriptive quotations, with Captain Dove of the *Olive Branch*, and Jasper Slyne for company, felt infinitely dispirited by the knowledge that she and none other was the present representative of that proud race.

The steamer drew in toward the anchorage and a ferry-boat put off from the shore to meet it. The kilted Highlandmen therein looked askance at Ambrizette and crossed themselves quite openly as she was handed down into it from the gangway. Slyne followed and held out his arms to Sallie, but she needed no such assistance. And the men in the boat seemed better content after a glance or two at her as she sat down and slipped a warm arm around Ambrizette, who was shivering in the winter afternoon.

The two remaining travellers jumped in, the baggage was transhipped, and the steamer swung about on her way to the farther north. The captain sounded his steam-whistle and waved his cap in parting salute as the ferry made its slow way ashore to the further accompaniment of a dirge-like chorus from the crew at its heavy sweeps; at which music Captain Dove snorted his disgust very audibly. He had awoke with a headache and had been in a bad temper all day.

By the way Slyne held a low-toned conversation with Mr. Jobling. And when the big boat was at length beached beside a rude pier, he paid the ferryman liberally, distributed some small change among the oarsmen, and bade them bring the baggage along to the little inn on the roadside at a short distance.

"Better send Ambrizette with me," he said to Sallie, and

the black dwarf trotted off after him in obedience to a few words from her mistress, while Mr. Jobling turned the other way, toward the Castle.

" We'll just have time to see over the old place before it's dark, Lady Josceline," the lawyer explained, and Sallie followed him with Captain Dove.

Slyne rejoined them before they were half-way up the long hill on the road which leads from the shore-level to the plateau. Sallie was still staring with troubled eyes at the huge, picturesque, rambling pile which seemed to grow always more immense as they drew nearer to it. It dwarfed into proportions almost infinitesimal the cluster of white cottages nestling cosily at the base of the great rock which formed its foundation. It seemed to dominate the whole visible world, to challenge even the mighty mountains which shut it in with the sea.

" That's the water-gate," Mr. Jobling mentioned and pointed out a black, oblong opening in the cliff-face at some height above even high-water mark and protected against possible intrusion by a heavy iron grating whose bars must have been as thick as a grown man's wrist. " I suppose the sea would be right up to its sill when the place was built.

" There's an underground passage connecting it with the interior of the castle, and they'd no doubt use that a good deal in the old days.

" And this is the North Keep, as it's called; newer, you'll maybe notice, than the west frontage, although it looks just as ancient. We'll soon have the Jura house-flag afloat again from the Warder's Tower, Lady Josceline, and the beacon-fire alight after dark. It always burns at night, you know, when the head of the family's in residence — a custom dat-

ing back to the days when there were no other lights on the coast.

" You'll see the moat now. Long ago it was always full, even at low tide. But now it's as dry as — "

" As I am! " grumbled Captain Dove, spitting down into the deep fosse which had formerly cut the castle off from the mainland but is now no more than an empty ravine spanned by an ornate drawbridge of modern date.

They crossed that, their footsteps producing an eerie clank on the planking, and came to a halt before the main entrance, over whose heavy, iron-studded oak doors still hung, a mute reminder of more stormy times, a massive portcullis armed with *chevaux-de-frise* of long, pointed spikes.

Slyne rang the electric door-bell.

It was some time before that summons was answered, but no one of the waiting group seemed to have anything to say to the others during the interval. The mystery of time itself was in the atmosphere. Some brooding spirit of the past might have been peering out at them from the watchman's wicket in the bartizan above. They stood still and silent until, at last, the postern in the big double-doorway was unlatched from within and a grey-haired, elderly woman with a hard-featured face, much lined and seamed, in the stiffly rustling garb of a superior servant, appeared in the narrow opening and dropped them an old-fashioned curtsy after a quick, shrewd glance at them.

" If it isn't too late, we'd like to be allowed to look over the castle," Slyne said politely raising his cap.

The woman was gazing intently at Sallie. She started as Mr. Jobling coughed, with intention, after they had waited a second or two for an answer.

" You will be very welcome, sirs," she said hastily. " I have authority to admit visitors. Will you be pleased to step in."

She looked long and very closely at Sallie again as the girl crossed the threshold; and then at the others in turn as they entered, one at a time, by the narrow postern. She closed it behind them, and led the way through a low, arched passage into a dimly lighted but spacious hall.

" We've just passed through the walls," Mr. Jobling informed them patronisingly, of his superior knowledge. " They're twelve feet thick on this front. Loquhariot would still be a hard nut to crack, eh? "

" I'd sooner crack a bottle than a nut," commented Captain Dove aside to Slyne, who frowned reprovingly at him.

The great hall they entered next could almost have housed a regiment. But it, like the guard-room through which they had come, was peopled only in dusky corners by fearsomely lifelike suits of armour. Its empty fireplaces made it seem still more desolate and deserted. War-worn flags hung from the gallery overhead, to which a wide stairway with many shallow steps gave access. Dead and gone Justices and St. Justs and Juras looked coldly down, from out of dark, tarnished frames, at the whispering intruders.

" You're Mrs. M'Kissock, aren't you? " Mr. Jobling remarked with affable condescension as they followed that hard-featured personage into a seemingly endless passage lined and hung with heads and horns and other trophies of the chase from all parts of the world.

She glanced sharply round at him again and bowed in silent assent.

" I've been here before, you know," he mentioned as she

ushered the little party into the first of an extensive suite of rooms at the far end of the corridor they had traversed. Sallie could scarcely repress the exclamation of pleasure that rose to her lips; for the rooms, all opening into each other and with the doors wide, stretched across the entire breadth of the building, so that their furthest windows looked straight out to sea. There was nothing between them and the wide Atlantic but a cluster of miniature islets, emerald-green, at the distant mouth of the loch.

" This was her late ladyship's favourite suite," said Mrs. M'Kissock precisely. " The outermost room was her boudoir once. But his lordship had that altered — afterwards."

Sallie listened like one in a dream. She could scarcely believe that these had once been her own mother's rooms, that this gaunt, austere serving-woman was stating matters of fact in that dry, lifeless voice of hers. She longed to get Mrs. M'Kissock alone and question her about — everything. But she had been warned by both Mr. Jobling and Jasper Slyne that she must contain every symptom of curiosity till they could grant her permission to speak for herself.

She passed, with a little, impatient sigh, from one range of rooms to another, each with its own tag of story or history duly related by Mrs. M'Kissock, until they reached the great hall again from a further passage, and very glad of her expert guidance through such a maze.

From there the housekeeper took them, by way of the central staircase and gallery up a steep corkscrew stair in a turret to the top of what had been the main tower before the North Keep had been built, and out on to the battlements, where the Spanish guns still stand guard, among a multitude of other obsolete pieces, including a carronade or

two from the ancient foundry at Falkirk, over the equally futile suits of mail in the halls below.

She offered to show them the dungeons and torture-chamber and oubliette, on the way to the water-gate, but Mr. Jobling declared that it was too late by then to go underground that day, and she led them instead along the north corridor, through the late earl's private study and library and smoking-room, through a dozen other equally superfluous apartments, till they regained the corridor at the end where an open doorway led through into the spacious circular hall at the base of the North Keep.

" This part of the castle is private, sir," Mrs. M'Kissock informed Mr. Jobling, who had already stepped in.

" I'd like my friends to see the sunset from the Warder's Tower," he returned, " if you don't mind. We won't disturb anyone on our way upstairs."

Mrs. M'Kissock still looked uncertain, but Slyne had already followed the lawyer's lead and Captain Dove was calmly pushing past her. She glanced at Sallie again, and then bowed her also in. And they all proceeded quietly up the carpeted winding staircase, past several landings, the doors of which were closed.

But the door at the turret-top was wide, and Mrs. M'Kissock was obviously a good deal disturbed in her mind as Mr. Jobling stepped to one side and politely gave Sallie precedence out into the open air.

Sallie smiled careless thanks for the courtesy and was still smiling when she emerged from the low doorway and stopped just beyond its threshold, so that Mr. Jobling and the others behind her had to wait patiently where they were while she gazed, enraptured and forgetful of all else, at the scene before her.

The sun was setting, blood-red, over the far sea-rim, and there was no least cloud in the radiant sky. The clear-cut mountains on either hand, the still loch and the broad Atlantic beyond it were all aglow with a marvellous, mystic light; the little cottages on the shore, three hundred sheer feet below her, were crimson instead of white; the very smoke which came from their chimneys seemed somehow ethereal and unreal.

She stood alone for a moment or two in a world transformed, till the quick, keen, exquisite pleasure of it brought a mist to her eyes that blurred it all, and, as she raised a hand to brush that away, she suddenly realized that she was not alone. There was a young man leaning over an embrasure at one corner of the battlements, who had been gazing, like her, at the sunset till she had come forth.

He was gazing at her now, and with even more admiration, however unconscious, than he had been bestowing on the beauties of nature inanimate; for the waning light had transfigured her sweet, sensitive features also, and into a semblance such as one might imagine an angel would wear.

Her eyes met his, and they two stood regarding each other so for the space of five fateful seconds. She had recognised him at once, but it was apparent that he did not yet know who she was.

He came forward then, limping a little, and bowed, bareheaded, to her; a sufficiently self-confident youth, straight and limber, good-looking enough, with smiling grey eyes and a mobile mouth, somewhat wistful at that moment in spite of his eyes.

"I'm sorry if I'm in the way," he said pleasantly. "Won't you come out and look round? The view all about

is beyond any words of mine — and you're only seeing part of it there."

He hesitated slightly, regarding her with a very puzzled expression, before plunging further, and then, " I'm Justin Carthew," he continued, since she made no move at all, " although my lawyers would have me believe that I'm the ninth Earl of Jura now! " He laughed aloud, as if that idea were amusing. " In any case," he concluded naïvely, " the sunset doesn't belong to me."

She stepped out into the afterglow, still without a word, her mind full of vague misgivings. And, as Mr. Jobling followed her from the doorway, with Slyne and Captain Dove at his heels, and Mrs. M'Kissock, nervously fumbling with her chatelaine, last of all, Justin Carthew drew back a couple of paces.

" Your lawyers have misinformed you, Mr. Carthew," said Mr. Jobling in his most dogmatic manner. " You are no more the ninth Earl of Jura than I am, because — Let me introduce you — more formally! — to Lady Josceline Justice, the late earl's daughter, on whose property you are trespassing here."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE LOSER

JUSTIN CARTHEW was standing as if thunderstruck by these extraordinary statements. His incredulous glance shifted from the stout stranger of the tinted eye and the inimical stare to the others of the little group regarding him, until it met Sallie's again, and they two looked blankly into each other's eyes while Mr. Jobling proceeded to introduce himself as her ladyship's legal adviser, and stated briefly the grounds on which his dogmatic assertion was based.

To Carthew, the lawyer's voice seemed to come from very far away, but none the less intelligibly, as he himself stood gazing at the girl to whom he owed his life, whom he had last seen late at night among the shadows on the deck of the *Olive Branch* in Genoa harbour. At first sight it had seemed so utterly impossible that it could be she who had stepped out on to the Warder's Tower of Loquhariot that he had supposed the sun in his eyes and a striking resemblance must have combined to delude him.

But — he knew now that it was really she. And as Mr. Jobling, concluding his homily, mentioned again who she claimed to be, he was dazedly thankful that he had not at once contradicted her lawyer; as he might have done — since he knew as a matter of fact that the real Lady Josceline Justice was dead.

Mr. Jobling had also repeated that Mr. Carthew was trespassing there. But at that Sallie turned on her legal adviser in generous indignation, and he shrank into the background again as she spoke.

"If this is *my* property, as you say it is," she flashed, "what right have *you* to tell any visitor that he is trespassing here! And if Mr. Carthew has been misinformed — "

"He isn't a visitor, Sallie. He's the man in possession at present," whispered the smartly-dressed young-old man who had been studying Carthew with a most supercilious expression, "and you'd better leave Mr. Jobling to deal with him." He was obviously not at all pleased with her, and his whisper was perfectly audible.

The girl had stopped to listen to him. "We're evidently the trespassers, then," she finished. "*We* have no business here at all while he remains in possession."

The other man of the party, a white-haired old fellow in clerical garb and wearing a pair of smoked glasses, also turned angrily toward her. But at that moment Mrs. M'Kissock came stumbling forward between them, with a little broken cry, all her habitual self-restraint vanished, her harsh features working, very near tears; and, lifting a hand of the girl's in both of her own to her lips, fondled it foolishly, muttering disconnected phrases.

"I knew — *I* knew it from the first," she mumbled, "and yet — I did not dare believe my own eyes. But now — God bless your bonny ladyship! And God be thanked for that you have at last come back to your own! Loquhariot has waited very long for this late day, and —

"Say ye now there's a *man* in possession!" she spoke up, glancing defiance at the individual in the Norfolk suit and

then, though with less of disfavour, at Justin Carthew. "Say ye so? — and to me, who have kept the keys of the empty Castle of Loquhariot for her ladyship here, ever since the Red Earl her father laid that trust on me from his death-bed!

"You have been ill-informed. There is *no* man in possession here."

Carthew was staring at her as if he were altogether at his wits' end. He almost doubted the evidence of his own ears. Had he not known as a matter of fact that Lady Josceline Justice was *dead*, old Janet M'Kissock's spontaneous championship of this pretender would almost have convinced him to the contrary. He could feel sure of only one further fact, which was that Sallie herself had been tricked into her impostor's part.

However, he had no time just then to come to any further conclusion. He had to decide at once what he should do to safeguard her, and did so, recalling only the debt he owed her.

"There *has* evidently been some mistake," said he, looking levelly into her troubled eyes. "I hope you won't hold me to blame for that. And, believe me, I'm very glad that you have come to Loquhariot."

He could say no more than that at the moment. He bowed to her, and, turning into the turret doorway, limped off downstairs. He wanted to be alone for a little. He wanted time to think. He felt absolutely stunned.

Mrs. M'Kissock, no less perturbed, her cap all awry, followed him down the winding stairway as far as the door of the rooms he had only occupied for a day or two.

"I'm going to remove to the inn," he said, in answer to her agitated excuses and explanations. "It will be better

so in the meantime. Will you tell one of the men to take my baggage there for me, please? "

He did not deem it advisable just then to ask her any question or make any comment at all. And within another minute or two he had passed out of the postern, surrendering the Castle of Loquhariot, for the time being, to one who had no claim or title to it.

But, as he stopped beyond the drawbridge to light the pipe he had mechanically pulled out, he pursed up his lips as though to whistle. And, " What proof can *I* produce! " he exclaimed, moving on again with the cold pipe between his teeth, his head bent, perplexed to the last degree.

The walk through the darkling woods to the village and the cold, clean air cleared his wits a little. He found Ambrizette huddled over the fire in the best room at the Jura Arms, and, having bespoken supper and a bed for himself, went on along the shore road to think things out, if he could.

Only half an hour before, he had been congratulating himself on the fact that his troubles were nearing an end. And now —

" It's been nothing but trouble ever since I first saw that damned advertisement," he remarked to himself, recalling step after painful step of the way he had travelled to where he was.

A few months before he had seen and answered an anxious advertisement in an American paper for any surviving relative, no matter how distant, of the Jura family, he had invested all of his scarce capital in a cattle-run in Texas which seemed to promise to pay quick profits. And, in spite of all that the English lawyers who had replied to his letter could say to tempt him, he had remained quite firm in his wise resolution to stay there and reap those profits before

crossing the Atlantic in pursuit of his further fortune; until a smart junior partner of theirs had paid him a flying visit at the ranch, and proved to him how foolishly he was acting against his own interests.

For it seemed, after due investigation and proof positive of his distant kinship with the family, that there could be only one life between him and the title of Earl of Jura, with all that pertained thereto — a life which even the very conservative English Court of Chancery was by then disposed to presume extinct.

The astute young lawyer had told Carthew all the facts which his firm had managed to ferret out concerning the late countess's disappearance and death. It seemed, humanly speaking, impossible that her child could have survived her. Justin Carthew had thought it all over and an accident had settled the question for him. His pony came down with him one day and he was badly trampled by the steers he had been heading. His doctor sentenced him to six months' rest — out of the saddle. As soon as he was able to move he raised a mortgage on the ranch and made for London. That mortgage was almost due by now, and his expected profit on the run had faded into a stiff loss during his absence.

Messrs. Bolder & Bolder, the lawyers aforesaid, had made it clear to him from the first that, while they had the utmost faith in the outcome of their exertions on his behalf, they could not see their way to place their services and special knowledge at his disposal except on a spot-cash basis; that, in short, he must provide in advance the money to foot their bill. He had done so, and they, in return, had not failed to implement all their promises. Even now he could not feel that they had dealt unfairly by him.

And the balance of his bank account had been eaten up by his expedition to Africa in search of more authentic record of the ex-dancer countess's death and as to the fate of her child. He had taken that somewhat rash step, too, of his own free will and for his own personal satisfaction. He was personally aware now that both the countess and her daughter were dead; but — he could bring forward no proof at all of that fact, and, as Bolder & Bolder had politely pointed out to him, his personal testimony alone was that of an interested party and worthless to them or anyone else.

He had suffered sorely, both body and mind, since he and his party had been betrayed into El Farish's hands by an Arab guide. And now —

He was a penniless peer of the United Kingdom, with every prospect of being unable to maintain those rights which he knew were his, an impecunious citizen of the United States, with a foreclosure threatening him there. The result of all his own efforts so far was failure.

And yet, he felt that he ought to be thankful that he had come through alive. "A living dog is better than a dead lion," he told himself. "And — I owe that girl my life. But for her, I'd be — " He shrugged his shoulders. It was not pleasant, there in the dark, to recall that hole in the sand on the African coast which he had only escaped by a hairbreadth, thanks to her.

"I wouldn't be here at all," he reflected. "And that fat lawyer of hers would see her settled into my place without any fuss. He said, in fact, that the Chancery Court had practically admitted her claim to it already.

"And now — *how* am I to get up and swear she's a fraud! How am I to repay all I owe her — by fighting her for another man's leavings!"

He halted, to fill his pipe, and found it full. He lighted it, and turned back toward the inn. It had just recurred to him that, even if he were disposed to fight her for his inheritance, there were very strong financial reasons as well as merely sentimental ones against that course. He was already in Bolder & Bolder's debt. He had had to apply to them by wire for his fare to London from Genoa. They had further defrayed the Court costs of that order of access to the archives of Loquhariot which Mr. Justice Gaunt had recently made in his favour, and had furnished him with a few pounds for subsequent expenses.

But they had taken the opportunity to mention, always politely, that they could go no farther than that beyond the terms of their original bargain: and that the next advance of cash must come from him to them.

In a word, he could not afford to fight either her or anyone else just then. And he had a very strong impression that the fat lawyer who had interposed between him and the girl would put up a protracted, expensive battle on her behalf.

" But some day I'll have a couple of rounds with *him*," Carthew promised himself. " Just at the moment — my hands are tied. And, what's more, the Courts are closed."

He sighed.

" I can't hurt her, in any case," he declared conclusively to the night. " I'm not much of a judge of girls, but — she's —

" I must just wait and see," he said to himself. " I'm helpless. And — I'm hers, anyhow, as I told her in Genoa. A promise is a promise, no matter what its keeping costs."

He looked up at the black bulk of the castle in the distance. Its numberless narrow windows were all aglow,

and in a cresset on one tower a fire was burning brightly.

" She's taken possession all right," he cogitated. " But probably she doesn't even know that the beacon's been kindled."

As he limped through the village again, he could not but notice the unusual stir in its long single street. At every cottage door there was a whispering group staring up at the Warder's Tower. The sound of oars in haste reached his ears from across the loch. And he was aware of many inquisitive glances directed at him as he passed.

His simple supper was awaiting him in the best room of the little inn. The black dwarf had been sent for from the castle, the outwardly stolid and incurious maid-of-all-work informed him. He sat down by the fire, content for the moment as he recalled the glamour of the afterglow from the west and Sallie's grave glance.

He thought of nothing else throughout his meal, and afterwards, puffing at a cigar in the lamp-lit porch with a plaid about him to keep the cold out, could scarcely bring himself to consider his own precarious situation again. When he at last applied his mind to that he was somewhat dispirited.

He had only a few shillings left in his purse, and could not afford to stay where he was for more than a day or two. He was a stranger in a strange land, a land in which, as he had learned already, men in their prime had to compete keenly for work which might bring them in no more than four or five dollars a week: a very unpromising land in which to be left with empty pockets.

" Perhaps old Herries will give me a week or two's work at something or other about the estate," he communed with

himself. " But, then, — that bloated lawyer would probably interfere; and, while I lie low, Herries will be under his thumb to a great extent. He's under the weather too, poor old chap! "

He was still shaking his head disconsolately when his cogitations were cut short by the sound of clattering hoofs and the hurried arrival of one on horseback, who galloped up to the Jura Arms and slipped like a sack from his saddle, and swayed and staggered while his blown steed looked inquiringly round at him, till Justin Carthew slipped an arm about him and would have led him indoors.

" What are *you* doing here, Mr. Herries? " Carthew demanded, amazed. " You should be at home in bed, and — "

" The beacon? " gasped the new-comer, a haggard, sick-looking old man with a long white beard, almost spent, but none the less resolute not to enter the inn.

" It seems that Lady Josceline Justice has just arrived at the castle," Carthew informed him concisely, after a moment of hesitation.

" Lady — Josceline — Justice! " the other repeated dazedly, but with evident disbelief. " Did you say — Lady Josceline Justice! You're surely joking, Mr. Carthew — although it would be no joke for you if her ladyship had come back to life."

" I'm not joking," Carthew assured him.

" But — how can it be! " the other demanded. " I can't conceive — Have you seen her yourself? "

" Yes, I've seen her," declared Carthew. He could not have answered otherwise without betraying Sallie.

" But come away in. You must get between the blankets again at once," he insisted firmly. " A five-mile gallop on

a night like this is quite enough to finish you. And there will be time enough in the morning — to pay her ladyship a call."

"I've been factor of Loquhariot these five and thirty years — and it would ill become me to be abed at such a moment. I'm going up now," the sick man asserted stubbornly. "I'm responsible for all that goes on here, as you know very well, Mr. Carthew — and I've had no news at all of this. I can't understand — And yet — it must indeed be her ladyship, as you say, since Janet M'Kissock — "

He caught at his horse's bridle again and tried to clamber into the saddle.

A group of whispering villagers had gathered about the inn door, and they joined Carthew in his well-meant remonstrances. But the anxious steward of the estate was not to be gainsaid by anyone.

"If the Lady Josceline Justice has come back to her own at last," he declared, shivering, "it is my undoubted duty to be on hand. And what matters else? Get the pipes out, lads, and gather together. Shall it be said of us that her ladyship lacked a true Highland welcome home?"

Carthew, seeing him so set in his purpose and not knowing how to prevent him except, perhaps, at Sallie's expense, saw nothing for it but to let events shape themselves. He brought the old man a little brandy, which served to steady him somewhat, so that he sat in his saddle none so limp at the head of the muster formed at his bidding. And Carthew walked up the hill by his side, partly to help him, and partly in hope of another glimpse of the girl who had surely bewitched himself.

At his heels tramped three stalwart pipers, and the still,

star-lit night rang again to the shrill strains of the march they struck up; while close behind, keeping step to its lilt, came a couple of hundred or so of the villagers and their visitors from mountain and glen and shore. Blazing pine-knots served for torches and lighted the way well, until they at length reached the landward front of the castle, where the sick man marshalled them in a wide, crimson half-moon about the drawbridge, while Carthew held his horse for him at one side.

The postern-door opened noiselessly and Janet M'Kissock looked out from within. Herries crossed the drawbridge toward her, and, " Eh, Janet, woman! " said he, " what's all this I hear so late? They tell me that the Lady Josceline Justice has come to Loquhariot, and — "

" It was because you were so ill that I didn't send word at once, Mr. Herries," the housekeeper put in defensively as he paused. " The beacon was fired without her ladyship's knowledge by one of her friends. I don't — "

" It *is* her ladyship, then? " the factor demanded, searching her face with his keen, anxious, fevered eyes. " Whence came she so suddenly, Janet? "

" It is indeed her ladyship," the old woman answered solemnly. " But — more than that I do not know. I have had all to see to since the sun set, and — "

The other checked her plaint with an uplifted hand.

" I'll hear about everything else by and by. And meantime — I've brought some of her own folk up to offer her welcome — since it *is* she," he said, all his doubts evidently dispelled by Janet M'Kissock's emphatic assurance. " Will she come out to us for a few minutes, think ye? "

" That will she, I'm sure," answered Mrs. M'Kissock. " Her ladyship has a heart of gold, as it were, and a very

kindly way with her. I'll send in word that her folk are here — she'll have finished dinner by now."

She turned and left him, closing the postern behind her so that only the red torch-light illumined the high portcullis and level drawbridge until, presently, the massive main-doors of the castle swung slowly back on their well-oiled hinges and in the heart of the glow from within appeared Sallie, with that young-old man whom Justin Carthew so disliked at her side in very correct evening clothes. But he stayed a little behind as she stepped forward and stopped under the portcullis, the flare of the torches full on her face, a very dazzling vision indeed. For she also was dressed for the evening, and in a creation from Paris.

Carthew's heart was thumping as he drew farther aside into the shadows. She had not noticed him in his plaid, holding the old man's horse.

CHAPTER XIX

THE WINNER

EVEN during the bewildering whirl of those days which had passed so swiftly since she had escaped from the *Olive Branch*, Sallie had thought very often of Justin Carthew and the strange situation in which circumstances had all conspired to place them toward each other.

Since she had found out what her rehabilitation, as Lady Josceline Justice, was going to cost him, she had been very anxious to see him again and make everything clear between him and her. But she could scarcely disclose to the others that she had met him before. Neither Captain Dove nor Jasper Slyne knew anything about him beyond what they had heard from Mr. Jobling. And Mr. Jobling could or would tell her nothing, in reply to a timid question or two she had put to him, beyond the bare fact that she had nothing to fear from the young American's ill-founded claim to her rightful place in the world.

She had been very anxious to see him again. But it had startled and confused her at first to find him, so evidently at home, on the Warder's Tower of Loquhariot. For she could not then, before the others, say anything at all of what was in her mind; and she was afraid that he might unguardedly, on the spur of the moment, reveal their unavoidable joint secret.

She could see that he had recognised her at last and that

he was no less at a loss than herself. Mr. Jobling's gratuitous rudeness to him vexed her very much. The old housekeeper's half-hysterical outbreak surprised her beyond expression. And then he was gone, before she could make up her mind that it was her own proper part to have bidden him stay till something could have been settled.

But when she suggested that to Slyne he pooh-poohed the idea as absurd, and told her she ought to be very glad to have got rid of her rival so easily.

He himself was in high glee over that unexpected outcome of Mr. Jobling's brusquely peremptory method with the interloper, and Captain Dove's face wore a triumphant grin. Mr. Jobling himself seemed inclined to be sulky with her, but the other two only laughed at his petulance.

"We've got possession!" said Slyne exultantly, "and that's nine points of the law, as *you* ought to know. If she hadn't taken the fellow's part he might have been more inclined to stand his ground. But now — up drawbridge and down portcullis! We'll hold the fort here, till that old Chancery Court of yours comes away with its final decision."

Captain Dove poked the portly lawyer in the short ribs. "Buck up, old rarebit!" he begged. "Don't look so glum. This is home, sweet home now. Come on down below and I'll get you some sort of a bracer from that sour-faced old Scotch hag with the keys. My mouth feels just as if it were made of blotting-paper, too."

"But you must go very slow yet, Dove," Slyne cautioned the elated seaman as he turned toward the stairway. "Don't go too fast. We aren't safely enough settled yet to —"

Captain Dove paused to look him between the eyes with a mirthless, meaning laugh.

"This is my adopted daughter's castle now, Mister Slyne," said he. "When we want any advice from you about how we're to behave in it — or anything else — we'll let you know. D'ye see?"

Slyne's lips parted and closed again. He had evidently thought better of giving voice to any retort, however effective.

"After you," he remarked politely, since Captain Dove still stood blocking the stairway and grinning fixedly back at him. "I must send down to the inn for Ambrizette and our baggage at once. It will soon be quite dark."

Sallie followed them slowly, like one in a dream, and Mr. Jobling came last. As they reached the circular hall below, Mrs. M'Kissock, still much perturbed, came hurrying in from the corridor.

"Mr. Carthew has gone, my lady," she said, dropping Sallie another deep curtsey, "and if your ladyship will be pleased to rest here for a little, it will not be long till the West Wing is all in order. I have only two maids to help me, with the castle empty so long, but I have sent down to the village for more, and maybe your ladyship will excuse — "

Sallie went up to her and took hold of the two trembling hands clasped tightly together against a jingling silver chatelaine.

"Janet," she said softly, and the agitated old woman looked gratefully up into her grave, wistful eyes, "I think you and I are going to be good friends, Janet," she said, "because — we have both been so lonely. And I want you not to worry yourself about anything. There's no hurry,

and we'll be quite content here till you have everything arranged as you wish."

"I thank you kindly, my lady," answered Mrs. M'Kissock, and curtsied again, and was going off about her business, when Slyne signed to her to wait a moment and drew Sallie toward the door.

"I'll have to go into a number of matters with you," said he condescendingly to the old housekeeper. "To save Lady Josceline trouble, you'll get all your instructions from me."

Mrs. M'Kissock looked mutely to her new mistress for refutation or confirmation of his right to claim her services so; and Sallie could not but nod as she recalled with a strange, new pang the promise she had made in Genoa, and the lengthy document she had signed in the Hôtel de Paris.

"This is Mr. Jasper Slyne, Janet," said she, "and — "

"Her ladyship's future — " Slyne was about to explain the importance of his position there when Captain Dove interposed.

"Slyne!" he called across the hall. "If there's nothing to drink in the house, whoever goes down to the inn for our baggage had better bring up — "

But Slyne had already got Mrs. M'Kissock out into the corridor.

"I'll send something in at once. Try to keep him quiet for a little," he said to Sallie, and she, having carefully closed the door, went back toward the fireplace to pacify the old man.

A few minutes later a pink-complexioned, flaxen-haired maid came tripping demurely in, with a great silver salver on which was set such an array of decanters that Captain Dove at once became most amiable again.

"And I will bring tea for your ladyship now," said the maid in her quaint Highland accent. "It was the other gentleman that told me to bring this first."

"That was quite right," Sallie reassured her, and asked her name.

"It is Mairi, my lady," the girl answered with a shy, gratified smile, and was very soon back with a beautiful service of Sèvres and a steaming urn.

Mr. Jobling virtuously declined Captain Dove's cordial invitation to help himself to a decanter, and asked Sallie for a cup of weak tea. At which the old man was still cackling discordantly when Slyne came in again a few minutes later.

"That's an obstinate old baggage!" said he, obviously incensed. "You must tell her, Sal—Lady Josceline, that she's to attend to my orders without any more back-talk."

Captain Dove turned in his armchair before the fire. "That woman's my adopted daughter's housekeeper now, Mister Slyne," said he, frowning darkly. "And I'll trouble you not to interfere in what's no concern of yours. You're only a visitor here, you know."

Slyne darted a black glance at him, but did not answer him otherwise. "I told her to get your mother's rooms ready for you," he mentioned to Sallie. "And Ambrizette will be there by the time you'll want her.

"That fellow Carthew has gone off to the inn," he remarked to Mr. Jobling. "I expect he'll be busy by now wiring Bolder & Bolder the news."

"That won't do him any good," Mr. Jobling returned. "And, even if he had any case to go on with, there's nothing more they could do for him until the Hilary Sittings

come on — very nearly a fortnight yet. As it is, he hasn't a leg left to stand on. You heard what old Gaunt said to her ladyship."

"There's no fear of anything getting into the newspapers prematurely, is there?" asked Slyne.

"I told Spettigrew to keep everything quiet," the lawyer answered complacently. "And, besides, they're all full to overflowing about the election that's coming on."

"I wonder if anyone ever wades through all the lurid twaddle they print at such times?" said Slyne, apparently pleased. And they two maintained a desultory conversation, to which Sallie only listened when it now and then veered back to matters which might affect Carthew or herself, until a sonorous gong began to sound in the corridor.

As its increasing thunder suddenly disturbed the cloistral quiet, Captain Dove, comfortably settled in his armchair beside the fire with a black clay pipe, started up in alarm and spilled the contents of the glass in his hand.

"What the devil are they about out there!" he ejaculated irascibly. "I'll blow a hole through that infernal tom-tom if they don't drop it."

"Time to dress for dinner," Slyne explained with a tolerant smile, and, rising, rang the bell. "Our rooms will be ready by now, I expect. But there's no hurry. All you need to change is your waistcoat."

"Damn nonsense!" snorted Captain Dove, and reaching for a decanter, was liberally refilling his glass when the girl Mairi answered the bell.

"Show her ladyship to her own rooms," Slyne directed. And Sallie followed the demure, flaxen-haired maid very eagerly.

On her way to the West Wing she could not but notice the change which had come over the place. A pleasant atmosphere of ordered activity seemed to pervade the vast building. There were men as well as women-servants busy everywhere. Light and warmth and life had put to flight the darkness and desolation which had come down with the dusk on its emptiness. She gave herself up for the moment to a delicious, childish sensation of snugness and safety there. And when she at length reached the open door of the splendid suite which, Mrs. M'Kissock had told her, had once been her mother's, she felt that she could not, after all, grudge the price she must pay by and by for her glimpse of home.

Ambrizette, with rolling eyes and open mouth, had everything in readiness for her in her dressing-room, for the hideous dwarf was indeed a very efficient *femme de chambre*. Within half an hour Sallie had had her bath and was dressed again, in the same frock that she had worn at the Savoy. She patted the dumb black creature on the head before turning away from the glass, and paused on the threshold to glance back into the cosy, fire-lit room with eyes which had grown unaccountably dim.

She found Mairi in the main hall, demurely flirting with one of the footmen whom Mrs. M'Kissock had conjured up, and Mairi showed her into a luxurious drawing-room where Slyne was standing, hands in pockets, before a cavernous, marble-faced fireplace in which a veritable bonfire of logs was cheerily crackling.

His eyes lighted up as she entered. The mirrors about the walls seemed to frame innumerable pictures of her as she crossed the slippery, age-blackened floor toward the big bearskin rug which made an oasis before the fire. He held

out his hands to her, dumbly. And just at that moment Mr. Jobling appeared in the doorway, trumpeting into his handkerchief.

Captain Dove arrived shortly after him, under convoy of a scared housemaid who, it seemed, had found him astray in some far corner of the castle and whom he had impressed into his service as guide. The gongs resounded again, just in time to drown his added denunciation of the oak floor, on which he had all but come to grief as soon as he set foot on it. The folding-doors at one end of the long room were pulled apart and a resonant voice announced ceremoniously that dinner was served. Slyne offered Sallie an arm a second or two in advance of the slower Jobling, and, as she laid a light hand on his sleeve, led her into the banquet-hall.

"I told them we'd dine here to-night, although there are lots of more modern rooms," he mentioned to her, and frowned in helpless annoyance as Captain Dove, following, gave vent to a very audible whistle.

A butler and four tall footmen, all in tartan kilts and full-dress doublets, were at their places about a table resplendent with silver displayed with old-fashioned profusion. Rare crystal and fine foreign glassware flashed and sparkled under the shaded lights standing on damask like snow, to which hot-house fruit and flowers added an exquisite note of colour. In the dim background, barely visible in the faint firelight, hung faded tapestries with, here and there, some portrait or pair of horns. There seemed to be a small gallery at the farther end of the hall. The unceiled rafters overhead were also almost in darkness.

Sallie, glancing about her with eager, delighted eyes, paused on the way to the table to peer through a pane of plate-glass let into the panelling over one mantel.

" That's the famous Fairy Horn, Lady Josceline," said Mr. Jobling officiously. " But — you haven't heard the old Jura legend yet, I suppose? " He coughed in his most important manner.

" Well, — the Fairy Horn is said to have been presented to one of your ancestors a very long time ago by the White Lady — the family ghost; every real old Scots family, you know, has a private ghost of its own. And the horn carried with it the privilege, to him or any succeeding chief of the clan, of summoning the White Lady, on three occasions, to fulfil any wish so urgent as to be worth the price of her help. For, every time she does show up, the head of the family dies. So that — the Fairy Horn has only been sounded twice, I've been told, during the centuries which have passed since then; and — on each occasion the wish expressed has been duly fulfilled, at the price of the chieftain's life."

Captain Dove turned restlessly in the chair on which he had scarcely sat down. Sallie knew that he was intensely superstitious, as so many seamen are, and that that shadowed hall would be the last place in which he would be willing to hear ghost-stories.

" Huh! " said he, irritably. " I don't believe a word of it, anyhow. What are we waiting for now? Gimme some soup, or something, you! "

He was still scowling over his shoulder at a surprised servant when, in an instant, there rose from behind the tapestry in a dark corner a low, moaning wail which swelled and sank and swelled again to a bitter, blood-curdling shriek. Captain Dove's face blanched as he pushed his chair from under him and sprang to his feet, armed with the nearest available weapon, a table-knife. The servant behind him had stepped back, in obvious alarm.

A man came striding out of the dusk in the distant corner, and, as he marched proudly up the room, the blare of the bagpipes over his shoulder seemed to make the very rafters ring. Twice he encircled the table, and then passed out of sight by the farther door.

Captain Dove had sat down again, grinding his teeth audibly. To cover his confusion, Sallie turned to the butler behind her chair, and, " What tune was that? " she asked, pleasantly.

Her face flushed as the Highlandman answered, in careful English, " It will be none other than the *Welcome to Jura* that your ladyship's head-piper would play this night."

She would have been even happier in her wonderful new home if she had not thought of Justin Carthew again at that moment, and of the difference her coming had made to him. She wished that she had been able to tell him at once, on the Warder's Tower, what was once more in her mind as she looked lovingly round the banquet-hall of Loquhariot — from which she had ousted him. She could not forget how gallantly he had faced fate at every turn, always making little of his own share in the tragic happenings which had involved them both.

She felt that she could not rest until she had set herself right with him, and made up her mind that as soon as dinner was over, she would ask Mairi or Mrs. M'Kissock to send a message down to the inn for her.

But dinner, under such conditions, was a long business. And, although both Mr. Jobling and Jasper Slyne did their best to make the time pass pleasantly for her, she was very glad when a message the butler brought her gave her an excuse for leaving the table a little before she would otherwise have got away.

She had hoped to escape alone, but Slyne had overheard what the man had said and accompanied her to the hall, where the old housekeeper was awaiting her.

"What's all this, Mrs. M'Kissock?" he asked, somewhat sharply. "And — who's Mr. Herries?"

"Mr. Herries is the factor in charge of the estates, sir," she answered, "and some of her ladyship's tenantry have come up from the village with him to offer her welcome. It was not my place to turn them away from the door without word from her ladyship's self."

"Oh, no," said Sallie, her eyes aglow and a sudden lump in her throat to think that her own folk were making her welcome. "I must see them, Janet. I must thank them —"

Slyne frowned, but made no further demur as Mrs. M'Kissock gave orders to open the doors.

The glare of the torches half-blinded Sallie as she stepped out; and she halted beneath the portcullis. But she saw an old man alone on the drawbridge and went on alone toward him. He doffed his Highland bonnet to her and bowed with old-fashioned deference. Then he looked her in the face for a moment or two, very keenly, while she returned his searching glance with happily smiling eyes which had nothing to hide from him. And all the time the pipers in the background were blowing their best.

He held up a trembling hand to them, and the shrill music ceased. The sputter of the torches was the only sound that broke the stillness until he spoke.

"Lady Josceline Justice?" he asked, and, as Sallie nodded, still smiling, "I am Ian Herries," he told her, "factor of Loquhariot and your ladyship's humble servant. I had no news of your ladyship's coming or I would have

been here in time to say welcome home on behalf of your ladyship's tenantry and myself."

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Herries," said Sallie, in a shy and very tremulous voice whose tone changed suddenly to one of urgent alarm. "But — you're ill. You must come in and rest.

"Oh, Jasper — "

The old man had almost collapsed, but Slyne hurried forward in time to save him from falling.

"I'll see to Mr. Herries," said he, with a great air of sympathy, and helped the sick man indoors.

Sallie looked a little uncertainly after him, and then faced the flickering torches alone again. The silent scrutiny of all the eyes regarding her was something of an ordeal, but she went bravely on across the drawbridge.

She did not notice the nip in the air, but some one among the assemblage had wrapped her about in a heavy plaid and drawn back before she could see who it was.

"Your ladyship will find the Jura tartan as warm as the welcome we all wish your ladyship," said a stalwart, bearded mountaineer, who had stepped to the front to speak for his fellows; and, as she smiled shy but very contentedly up into his scarlet face, he bent his head above the hand she had held out to him.

One after another the hill-men and fisherfolk of the village filed past her then, each with some stammered salutation, in difficult English or guttural Gaelic. And for each she had a shy, grateful smile and a word of thanks, until at the last came Justin Carthew and had also stooped and kissed her hand before she could prevent him.

He would have passed on like the others but that she,

blushing hotly, begged him to wait. For Janet M'Kissock had come to her shoulder to say that at the Jura Arms in the village would be provided a loving-cup in which all might drink her ladyship's health, as was proper on such an occasion, and had brought out the big, silver-mounted hunting-quaich in which every new Earl of Jura had pledged his people on his accession.

The butts of the torches had been flung in a heap on the ground before the girl, and formed a fiery pyramid between her and the waiting throng.

She lifted up the drinking-horn, her eyes very bright, and cried at the pitch of her clear, sweet voice a single, strangely-sounding word in the Gaelic, that Janet M'Kissock had whispered to her once or twice. And the sudden, thunderous roar of response that rang out in answer, as if from a single throat, awoke wild echoes among the surrounding hills.

"Your ladyship will come inbye now," begged Mrs. M'Kissock, as the pipes struck up again at the head of the gathering on its way back to the village.

But, "Just in a minute, Janet," said Sallie, "I'm quite warm. And — you needn't wait."

The bonfire before her was burning low in spite of the wind which had just begun to blow and promised to freshen. She stayed beside it, watching, until all but Carthew were gone. And then she turned to him, the tears very near her eyes and her starved heart almost satisfied.

"Oh, Mr. Carthew," she said timidly, "I wanted to tell you at once how sorry I am about — everything. I had no idea at all, when you told me on the *Olive Branch* — "

"Of course not," said Justin Carthew concisely.

"And Mr. Jobling was so — abrupt; and — I didn't

know what to do. Won't you please forgive me; I had no idea — "

"I was pretty much taken aback myself," said Justin Carthew, and laughed a little, though not very merrily. "But — I'm all right again now. And you mustn't worry about me, please. I'm all right, again, and — "

"You'll wait for a little? " she interrupted, she was so eager to reassure him. "I can't help being who I am, but — if you will only wait for a little, everything will turn out all right for you, too."

She could see that he was puzzled.

"I can't explain," she went on hurriedly, afraid that he would demand explanation. "But I want you to give me a little time, if you will. I want you not to go away. If you will just wait — for only three months — everything will turn out all right for you in the end."

"But — how — " he was beginning, when she cut him short again.

"I can't explain," she repeated. "Only — you once promised that I might ask you to do anything I wanted. Will you not just wait here, and trust me — for only three months? And then you'll understand."

He looked helplessly about him.

"I'll wait here — and trust you — all the rest of my life," he said, "if you say so. And then I'll still be in your debt."

"All I ask is my three months," she told him gravely. "And then — "

He looked his utter perplexity.

"You don't mean that you're Lady Josceline Justice only for the time being? " he asked, his forehead wrinkled.

"Oh, no," she answered assuredly. "I'll be Lady Jos-

celine Justice all my life. And — you'll keep your promise? "

" I'll keep my promise," he affirmed. " I'll wait here and trust you for three months — and for the rest of my life, if you say so."

She smiled at him, very contentedly. " I'm going to be very happy here now," she said, and looked round. She had heard Slyne's voice, calling her. She could see him beyond the drawbridge gazing blindly out into the darkness.

" Good night," she said to Carthew. But she did not go in until he had swung himself into the saddle and ridden away, always looking back.

CHAPTER XX

BEGGAR - MY - NEIGHBOUR

THE wind that rose during the night brought with it a change in the weather. When the day broke and a round red sun rose from among the mountains, it showed the whole world white — the land deep under snow and the sea all foam.

Slyne's first sensation when he woke and saw the storm, from behind the double windows of his comfortable rooms in the Warder's Tower, was one of relief, since it would surely serve to stave off inconvenient visitors. He had been afraid that the news the beacon had blazoned the night before would travel altogether too fast and too far to suit his plans; it would have been awkward in the extreme to be inundated with curious callers in a position practically carried by assault, only tenable by stealth and while no one in active authority should challenge it.

The coming of Herries, the factor, had opened his eyes to that. For the old fellow, ill as he was, had shown a most annoying inclination to cross-question Slyne about various dry legal details; and Slyne had only been able to put him off temporarily by promising that her ladyship's own man of law would go into all such matters with him in the morning.

Now, fortunately for Slyne and his friends, the factor need not be further considered for some little time to come,

if indeed at all. The fever in him had refused to yield to any of Mrs M'Kissock's simple medicaments, and he was delirious. He seemed very likely, indeed, to die unless he were very lucky. Slyne did not fail to congratulate himself on that score also, as he sat up in bed to reach for a cigarette after his late breakfast and contemplate the cuffs of his expensive pink silk pajamas.

The rest of the company in the castle he thought he could find means to control, for the present, at any rate, although he did not under-estimate the chances of trouble with his two disaffected associates, who had already displayed such a lamentable tendency toward open mutiny. But, on the whole, he felt satisfied that, if he could only keep matters running smoothly during the days that must still elapse before the Court of Chancery should resume its usual routine and finally settle the Jura succession on Sallie, he would by then have managed to make his own footing there absolutely secure.

He snuggled back between the blankets again, with an inexpressible sensation of comfort, and, watching the blue spirals of smoke curl upwards from under his moustache, forgot all the anxious uncertainties and the ever more painful pinch of the present in contemplative anticipations of that fair future which he had so carefully planned for himself. Not even the fact that he had almost exhausted his cash resources could worry him when he thought of the wealth that was to be his as soon as he should be safely married to Sallie; and until then he could command unlimited local credit, on her behalf.

She was Lady Josceline Justice already. She would be Countess of Jura in her own right as soon as the Court of Chancery should admit her identity. She would have ten

millions of dollars in ready money for him to spend and a quarter of a million for annual income. He had been a poor man all his life, but now — he looked luxuriously out at the snow and the storm.

"Mr. Jasper Slyne and the Countess of Jura," he said aloud, and smiled and curled his moustache.

He rose by and by and betook himself to his dressing-room, whistling a cheery tune. "And although I don't want to rush things," said he to himself as he stepped briskly into his bath, "if either Dove or that fat suicide makes any more fuss, I'll have to show 'em my teeth. They must both keep to the bargains we struck. And I think I've made things pretty safe for myself by now."

When he at length strolled downstairs, infinitely refreshed after his long rest, he found Mr. Jobling and Captain Dove in close conclave in the library. And he did not like their looks in the least or their sudden silence at sight of him. He felt certain that they had been conspiring against him, and did not delay in commencing a counter-attack.

"'Morning, Dove. 'Morning, Jobling," said he casually, as he stopped to select a cigar from the box on the table. "Change of weather, eh! You'll have a cold journey back to London, Jobling."

Mr. Jobling looked very coldly across at him. "I do not propose to return to London at present, Mr. Slyne," he replied. "Mr. Spettigrew will look after everything there."

"You're no more use to me here," said Slyne bluntly, "and you *may* be of some service in London."

"You are no longer a client of mine, Mr. Slyne," the lawyer retorted, no doubt emboldened by the promise of Captain Dove's unswerving support. "I can no longer act

for you with any feeling of confidence — since I have found out how unfairly you have attempted to treat Captain Dove."

Slyne understood that open war was declared. "I won't be a client of yours for long, if you're going to be troublesome," he affirmed. "I think you've got a little out of your depth again, my friend. I don't think you'll find it will pay you to take that tone."

Mr. Jobling began to splutter, and Captain Dove evidently felt impelled to come to his aid.

"You take too much on yourself, Slyne," said he, eyeing that gentleman with extreme disfavour. "You seem to think you're the whole show here, though you're nothing but a hanger-on, as I've told you before. Let's have a good deal less of it, or — We can get on just as well, or even better — without you, you know."

Slyne turned a contemptuous stare on him. "So that's the idea now, is it!" he remarked, without any sign of heat. "You two think it's a case of dog eat dog now, do you! And — after you've got rid of me, who picked you both up out of the gutter, you'll be at each other's throats. You're a great pair!"

His nonchalance incensed the old man, as he had intended it should.

"I want none of your damned lip," declared Captain Dove, glaring at him, "you precious upstart! You're nothing but a beggar on horseback yourself, for all your grand airs. Me and this other gentleman are both sick-tired of them. You're one too many — "

"I'm one too many for you two, at any rate; and you may both stake your last cent on that," Slyne told him with a composure admirable under the circumstances. "You

surely don't imagine, do you, that I'm here on any such unsafe footing as you are! I thought you knew me well enough, Dove, to be sure that I'd leave you no opportunity to go back on your bargain with me."

"To hell with you and your bargains!" cried Captain Dove: and then, restraining his rage, lowered his voice again. "The mistake you've always made with me, Slyne, has been to take me for an old fool — as you've very often called me to my face. You think I'm in my dotage. But — I'm not too old to show *you* a trick or two yet, if you and I come to grips. And, as for being such a fool as you seem to think me — you wait and see! I've a card or two up my sleeve, Mr. Slyne, that'll maybe euchre your game for you, if you try to bluff too high!"

Slyne sat back and studied the old man's face. Captain Dove had made that same mysterious threat on board the *Olive Branch* in Genoa, before they had started out on their present adventure. It had disconcerted Slyne then. It disconcerted him still more now.

"Don't you think that you're a little inclined to overrate your importance and — er — capacity, Mr. Slyne?" put in Mr. Jobling acidly during the pause, involuntary on Slyne's part. "All your ideas are no doubt based on the documents we mutually signed in Monte Carlo; and you are probably not aware, as I am — now that I have a clearer insight into your motives — that they amount to neither more nor less than a conspiracy to defraud. You would be well advised, believe me, to put them all in the fire."

Slyne turned on him in an instant. "Now, see here, my friend! I want you to understand, once and for all, that I've got *you* safe where I want you, and that, if I hear much more from you, you'll find yourself in a very unpleas-

ant fix. You wouldn't look well at all in a striped suit — or I believe it's the broad-arrow pattern they supply in the prisons here. And that's what you'll come to, believe me, unless you walk the line I've laid down for you. You can't embezzle trust funds, you know, and pay the interest with promises to be met as soon as you lay your hands on some of the plunder here, without running a very dangerous risk indeed. Why, even the car you sold me in Genoa was another man's property — and I hold your receipt for the price I paid you for it.

" So shut up," he concluded sharply, and proceeded to deal with Captain Dove as if the lawyer had not been there.

Mr. Jobling's flaccid face had become of the colour of mottled clay. He was respiring stertorously, through his mouth. His eyes had grown blood-shot. His back-bone seemed to have given way. He sat huddled up, silent, staring at Slyne with eyes full of impotent fear.

" You talk to me about bluffing! " Slyne was saying to Captain Dove, who also seemed to have grown suddenly apprehensive of some unforeseen mischance. " You talk to me about bluffing, although I've played a straight game with you from the start and stuck to our bargain even against my own interests. Wait a minute. Listen to me — and then you can talk till you're tired.

" Do you want to keep your clever new friend there company in his cell? How long do you think you'd be left at liberty if I mentioned to the authorities that you're the same man who — "

" Stop, now, curse you! " roared Captain Dove and so drowned the disclosures which Slyne seemed minded to make. " And don't go too far with me, or — "

Slyne looked without winking into the muzzle of the re-

volver which the old man had produced in an instant and levelled at him. "You talk to me about bluffing!" he said again, and laughed, without mirth. "You'd be better occupied, Dove, in making sure that your own bluff isn't called. You've done your best for a week past to give yourself away to the police, and — if you manage that in the end, you won't have me to blame, remember. *I'm* not the sort of yellow dog you seem to want to make yourself out."

He paused, to let that vitriolic criticism sink in, and to consider just how far he might safely go. Captain Dove had laid his revolver down but kept a hand on its butt. He was watching Slyne intently.

"I wish you could get it into your head," the latter resumed a little more peaceably, "that beggar-my-neighbour isn't the easiest game to play with me. And that I've got brains enough to take care of myself.

"If you and your cute new friend there were to be put away to-morrow, I'd stay here safe and sound. I've nothing to fear.

"I've kept my bargain with you both so far, and I'm quite willing to complete it. I'm going to see, at the same time, that you keep yours with me. You'll each get your promised share of the profits here, no more and no less; and then — I'll be done with you. Till then — don't go *too* far with me," he finished warningly.

"To hear you talk, any one would think you owned Loquhariot already!" remarked Captain Dove. "I'd like to hear what Sallie has to say about it all now."

"I'll get her to tell you at once, if you like," Slyne answered evenly and, rising, rang the bell.

"Ask her ladyship to favour us with her company for a

few minutes," he instructed the footman who answered that summons, " or if she'd prefer to receive us in her own room." Then he lay back in his chair again, his wits busily at work. He could not feel quite sure himself what Sallie would have to say about it all now; but — he meant to master her also.

The servant, however, came back with word that her ladyship had gone out. And at that Slyne scowled. It was at a most inopportune moment for him that Sallie had taken a liberty of which she would not have dreamed a few days before; and, furthermore, it did not fit in with his plans at all to have her making such use of her new-found freedom; there was no telling whom she might meet — there was that fellow Carthew, for instance!

" Which way did her ladyship go, do you know? " he called after the footman, as casually as he could.

" To the village, I think, sir," the man replied, and he rose, yawning, to look discontentedly out at the wintry landscape. It was very beautiful in the brisk morning sunshine, but also very wet underfoot.

" I'll stroll down the road after her," he announced, " and fetch her back. You can be packing up in the meantime, Jobling. The steamer south sails early in the afternoon."

He did not hesitate to leave the two conspirators alone together again; he judged that he had succeeded in cowing them both. He even smiled to himself on his way outdoors.

" I thought I was done for when I met Dubois," he reflected, perfectly self-satisfied, " but — I was really in luck. And that was a most opportune chat I had with Mullins in London, too. I've got Jobling fairly fixed. If I can't

manage the old man — I'm a bigger fool than I take myself for. And I've made things all right for myself with Sallie, or I'm mistaken."

He paused in the main hall to look appreciatively about him while a servant was fetching his coat and cap from the cloak-room. The sun was streaming in through the stained glass of a lofty, mullioned window, the heart of each of whose panels showed in vivid scarlet against the light a clenched hand holding a dagger, the Jura crest.

"*They* won it all that way," said Slyne to himself, and drew a deep breath of contentment as he looked round the noble hall again. He felt very proud of the place already, and only wished that some of his former friends could have seen him there.

Outside, beyond the drawbridge, he halted to look admiringly up at the massive, ivy-clad frontage of the Main Keep, with its crenellated ramparts and narrow fighting-windows and bartizan. Then he turned with a high heart toward the road that runs between hazel thickets and clumps of alder or silver birch down the long hill to the village and the seashore. He was humming a contented tune to himself as he tramped through the melting snow.

He had not far to seek Sallie. Within the open doorway of the first cottage he came to, he caught sight of her beside the peat-fire with a laughing child on her lap and its proud mother smiling beside her.

He walked in on them, and she looked up at him very happily as he entered. The mother curtsied, which pleased him. So that he made himself most agreeable to them both, and did not take Sallie away at once as he had intended. He was quite gratified to see how graciously she filled the part of Lady Bountiful. He wanted her to be popular

among the villagers, and meant to make himself popular as well. He was only afraid that her ignorance of the conventions might lead her into making herself too cheap.

She was only a young girl yet, and he knew that her innate purity of mind had never been sullied nor her sweet, loyal, lovable nature in any way warped amid the strange surroundings and circumstances in which she had lived till then. She was as happy playing with the cottager's child as she would have been in a palace. But — the daughter of Torquil Fitz-J. Justice, Earl of Jura and Baron St. Just of Justicehall and Loquhariot, must not make herself too cheap, thought Slyne. And presently he suggested to her that it was time to be going.

She rose, a little reluctantly, and followed him; while he bowed patronisingly to the fisherman's wife — just as he imagined a grand gentleman would do.

He did not demur when Sallie turned down the village street instead of up-hill again. He was quite pleased to show himself there at her side — and touch his cap condescendingly in response to the salutations of all who passed. He only omitted that very casual courtesy to Justin Carthew, standing at the door of the Inn.

"I suppose there's no doubt that Mr. Carthew was wrongly informed by his lawyers, Jasper?" Sallie asked him a few minutes later.

"No doubt in the world," Slyne answered her. "He's of no account at all now. The best thing he can do now for himself is to clear off back to America, where he belongs.

"And — there's another thing, my dear. Captain Dove and that fat ass Jobling have got to go too. We'll never have any peace while they're hanging about. But they're

both inclined to be troublesome, and I want you to back me up against them.

"It was Captain Dove who ordered the beacon to be lighted last night. And — Lord only knows how much annoyance that may cause us yet! In fact, they're a pretty difficult pair to handle. So, when we get back to the castle, I want you to tell them that you intend to keep your promise to me; I'll be better able to manage them then, you see.

"You haven't forgotten just what you promised me, have you?"

"No, Jasper," answered the girl, and gazed across the wind-swept loch with fond, despairing eyes, "I haven't forgotten. And — I'll keep my promise, if — when the time comes."

CHAPTER XXI

THE JURA SUCCESSION

CAPTAIN DOVE, sucking at his black cutty-pipe in the library of Loquhariot, looked very contemptuously at Mr. Jobling. It was self-evident that Mr. Jobling was afraid of Slyne and feeling very sorry for himself.

But Captain Dove was in no such disconsolate mood. Glancing at the despondent lawyer out of his little red-rimmed eyes, he even grinned, still more contemptuously. *He* was not afraid of Slyne, he told himself, and it made no material difference to him that his recent attempt to browbeat that grasping scoundrel had failed, even with the London lawyer for ally. For Captain Dove did not intend that either of the other two should eventually get the better of him. He was playing a waiting game, in which he meant to come out winner at any cost.

So far as Captain Dove was concerned there were only two persons really concerned in the question of the Jura succession. One was Sallie, the other himself — her adopted father!

He looked upon Mr. Jobling as a mere mechanical instrument, such as could be replaced at a moment's notice if that were needful, now that the legal details of the case had been carried so far toward final success. Slyne was absolutely superfluous there and had outlived his usefulness,

in so far, at least, as Captain Dove was concerned. More than that, he was in Captain Dove's way. So, to some extent, was Justin Carthew, since it seemed that Sallie felt called upon to make a fool of herself for his benefit; but Captain Dove did not anticipate any great difficulty in dealing with him. And so was Herries, the factor, who had so many inconvenient questions to ask — although he need scarcely be taken into account at present while he was abed and likely to be there for some time to come.

With all of these, in any case, he felt quite capable of coping — except with Jasper Slyne, who had threatened, a few moments before and in the hearing of an attentive witness . . . Slyne was undoubtedly dangerous now; and it must be his first care to free himself for all time from the risk of Slyne's telling . . .

" I have it," said Captain Dove, his furrowed forehead suddenly cleared and his face contorted into a smile at sight of which Mr. Jobling was seized with a sickly, sinking sensation. " I have it. We must keep quiet of course, until the *Olive Branch* turns up, but she shouldn't be very long now, and then —

" I'll send for Brasse. I warned that fool Slyne to play fair with me — but he won't. And so — since it's beggar-my-neighbour we're at, *he* won't be my neighbour for long."

Mr. Jobling rose, coughing irritably. The reek from Captain Dove's foul pipe was too much for him.

" I'll go and pack now," he announced. " I'd never have come here at all if I had thought — "

" You leave things here to me, old cock," Captain Dove encouraged him. " And go and jag your friend Spettigrew along till he gets judgment for us. That's the most important part of the game at present. Leave things here to

me, and you'll find, when the time comes, that Slyne will have to take a back seat."

But the stout solicitor did not seem grateful at all for that crumb of comfort. He merely looked at Captain Dove with equal dislike and disbelief as he left the room.

He left the castle immediately after lunch, to catch the steamer south, a little less depressed, perhaps, after a few further words with Captain Dove, who thought it only politic to inspirit him in his efforts on Sallie's behalf. And he had not been gone very long before Captain Dove began to miss him — as a boon-companion, a part which Slyne refused to play any longer. So that the old man soon began to find the time hang very heavy on his hands, and his grudge against Slyne always grew.

Under any circumstances, he could not have been happy for long on land. Nor could he feel altogether safe there, even in the distasteful disguise he had adopted at Slyne's advice; and for discrediting which he had been so repeatedly called to account by Slyne. He could scarcely but repent having sacrificed his undisputed autocracy on the *Olive Branch* in order to figure as a mere puppet in Slyne's company, as he had undoubtedly become since he had left his ship. He grew very angry indeed with Slyne when he thought of that, as he often did during those endless days of waiting.

It was all Slyne's fault, he assured himself, that he was thus stranded there; that he had not fifty cents left to bless himself with, since one expensive evening in Paris; and that, even if he had had such a sum in his pockets, it might have worn a hole in them before he could spend it, in such a forsaken spot!

Of what use to him, he inquired of himself, going off at

another tangent, could a huge, ghost-haunted pile like the Castle of Loquhariot be? Or a great empty barrack like Justicehall? — which reminded him unpleasantly of the Law Courts in London. How could he ever hope to spend such an excess of wealth as was soon to be Sallie's, and, therefore, at his disposal? A perfect nausea of money possessed Captain Dove at such moments. He would almost have preferred the prospect of poverty again, if only for the sake of the interest in life the struggle to live might restore to him.

" Enough is as good as a feast! " said he to himself every now and then while he gazed, with gloom in his soul, at the cut-crystal decanters on a salver of solid silver which was never far from his elbow; and, with that wise saw on his lips, he would continue to drown his contradictory sorrows as deeply as possible.

But there was luckily room and to spare in the castle for all its inmates. Slyne and he kept as much as possible out of each other's way, although they had resumed a spasmodic outward semblance of amity, a steadfast inward determination to get the better of one another, whether by fair means or foul. He could scarcely seek Sallie's company now that she knew his treacherous intentions toward her. The sick man, Herries, was still in bed, in a sufficiently precarious state. So that he lived very much alone with his various grievances, since his walks abroad, as far as the Jura Arms, — where he soon became almost popular among the occasional profligates of the village, — were not so frequent as they would probably have been in better weather.

A bitter east wind, bringing always more snow, had blown almost ceaselessly for the best part of a fortnight before

any change came in the wildest weather that had befallen Loquhariot in long years.

The mountain roads for miles in all directions were quite impassable. The mail-cart, with its driver and horses, and also the hastily improvised snow-plough which had attempted their rescue, lay buried deep below the ever deepening drift into which it had plunged on its last outward journey. The single telegraph-line that served the locality had broken down at a dozen points which were quite unapproachable. Stress of weather had prevented the weekly steamer from making its usual call. Loquhariot was absolutely cut off from the outer world.

And then, with a wet westerly wind which soon grew into a gale, the snow on the mountains began to melt and floods made matters still worse, swelling every unconsidered stream into a destructive torrent, cutting wide chasms across the precipitous main-road over the Pass, undermining its bridges and even washing some of them away bodily. In several of the more outlying districts sheer famine began to grow imminent. The flocks and herds of the countryside were in still worse case than the wild deer which had escaped from their forest sanctuaries before the first of the snow and had been huddling about the village while it endured.

No word had come through from Mr. Jobling in all that time. And Captain Dove was almost beyond the end of his outworn patience before, scowling blackly out of the library window one day when the westerly gale had all but blown itself out, he caught sight of a shabby, sea-going, cargo-tramp, flying the Norwegian flag, which seemed to be seeking an anchorage behind the Small Isles at the mouth of the loch.

It was the *Olive Branch*. He would have known her in the dark, disguise or no disguise.

"Uh-hum!" he exclaimed, in an ecstasy of relief. "*Now* I can make things move a little at last. Now we'll soon see who's who here."

He dashed off a peremptory note to his chief engineer, put that in his pocket, clapped his smoked spectacles on his nose and his soft felt hat on his head, and made for the village, where he hoped to find, in the Jura Arms, a local poacher who would undertake an errand out to the steamer.

He found his man at the inn, and his credit there enabled him to drive a speedy bargain. It also helped him to pass the time contentedly enough till the fishing-boat returned from its wet trip with word for the public that the strange steamer had put into the loch on account of an accident in her engine-room which would delay her there for a little, although she would need no help from the village; and with a hasty private note from the chief engineer for Captain Dove — to the effect that Mr. Brasse refused to come ashore.

"Curse him!" snarled Captain Dove as his messenger retired to the bar again. "I suppose he's afraid of the police — though there isn't a policeman within thirty miles, and, even if there were, it wouldn't matter very much." And he sat down to compose another and still more peremptory note, bidding Brasse obey his lawful commands or take the consequences of disobedience.

He would have put off to the steamer himself but for the obvious reasons against that course. And, to induce his messenger to make the trip again after dark, he had to promise the man twice as much as for the first run, still outstanding.

When he finally emerged from the inn, in no very pleasant temper, he caught sight, first, of the weekly steamer already half way up the loch, inward bound, and then of Sallie at a bend of the road in the distance, on her way back to the castle from the village. There was some one with her. It was Carthew.

Captain Dove became still more incensed, and, his mind a good deal inflamed by his recent potations, set off up the hill in pursuit of them, breathing noisily, not even pausing to scowl at the children who scurried indoors as he passed with the skirts of his long black coat streaming out behind him.

He had heard from Slyne that Herries, the factor, had formally appointed the young American his deputy until he should be able to undertake his own duties again. And, in spite of all Slyne and he could say to Sallie, she had obstinately refused to assist in getting rid of Carthew. He had heard from Slyne that Carthew was making far too many occasions for seeing her, and when he had cautioned Sallie on that score she had shown no disposition at all to take his advice.

"I've warned her often enough," he muttered with steadily rising wrath, "to quit monkeying with that fellow. And she'll get right out of hand now, unless I let her see, once and for all, who's going to be master here. Where would I come in if *he* managed to get married to her! He's got to go. That's all there is to it. I can't afford to have him hanging about here any longer."

The couple in front seemed to be in no hurry, however. He had almost overtaken them before he paused at a hazel-clump to cut himself a stout cudgel. By the time he had got that trimmed to his taste, they had almost reached the castle.

" I'll wait till she's gone in," said Captain Dove to himself. He had noticed that Carthew was carrying what looked like a woodman's axe. But that did not daunt him at all in his purpose. He lingered along the edge of an alder-thicket until at length Sallie shook hands in very friendly fashion with the young American and went her own way, while Carthew took to a trail through the woods and made off at a round pace, notwithstanding his limp, axe on shoulder, whistling blithely.

The path he was following wound in and out among plantations of pine and great groves of grey, leafless birches, until, at a distance of half a mile, it found the clear edge of the cliffs overlooking the circular inlet which forms the head of the loch, and finally faded away at the marge of a smooth plateau of bare rock enclosed on three sides by a thick tangle of woodland and rank undergrowth.

Captain Dove stalked him with all precaution, stepping from stone to stone among the wet snow which was rapidly melting, so that he might leave no traceable footprints on the soft, spongy soil or damp, dead leaves. And once, when Carthew halted to light a pipe, the old man, with murder in his mind, dropped into cover behind a moss-grown boulder at one side of the path — because that would have been a most unadvisable spot at which to attack a man armed with an axe. Then, as Carthew moved on, he once more took up the pursuit, through the clumps of bramble and bracken between the dark trunks of the firs about him.

Carthew stepped unconcernedly out of the dusk of the woods into the open space at the end of the path, and stopped there, axe on shoulder, to look about him. But Captain Dove did not immediately spring upon him as he

had been minded to do, for he had just observed, at a corner of the convenient plateau, a round hut, stone-built and roofed with heather, which might or might not be inhabited. Captain Dove wormed his way round toward it, within the thicket.

The windows of the hut were shuttered and its door padlocked on the outside. Captain Dove was delighted. He turned to squint across at Carthew from behind a bush and judge his distance, but still delayed his attack.

Carthew seemed to have seen something of interest in the dark wood behind Captain Dove, and Captain Dove looked round in instant alarm. It would have been most unpleasant to find that he himself was being spied upon. There was some one or some thing, a tall white shadow, very dimly discernible, moving among the gloom.

A sudden and most unusual sensation of panic seized Captain Dove. The inexplicable shape was flitting soundlessly toward him. He felt thankful that Carthew was there behind him, alive and well, for company. But when he rose upright and glanced swiftly over one shoulder the plateau was empty. Carthew had gone.

The evening was drawing in, and even the pathway by which they had come there was growing dim as the light slowly failed. Captain Dove made a blind dash for it across the open space, and so fled headlong, in fear.

He only once looked back, and then he saw the shadow again. It was following him. And he did not stop running till he reached the drawbridge of the castle. But there he halted, panting, to swear at himself for a superstitious old fool, and stare back into the woods with eyes in which terror was mingled with rage.

"Some stray cow — or maybe a stag!" he declared to

himself. "If I had had a shot-gun handy — or even my revolver — "

But, stare as he would, he could see nothing more of the creature. And he went in through the postern, still swearing under his breath.

He had never felt quite at his ease in the great main hall of the castle, which, with its empty suits of mail in all sorts of unexpected corners, the flags overhead flapping soundlessly in every draught, the pale faces peering down from their dark frames in the gallery, possessed an uncanny atmosphere of its own, especially in the dusk.

However, the two big fires blazing on their cavernous hearths at either side of its wide expanse made it a good deal more homelike, less eerie than it had seemed when he had first seen it. And he crossed it almost without concern on his way toward his own quarters in the North Keep.

But by the way some obscure movement among the shadows beyond the nearer fire brought his heart to his mouth again in an instant, and a hand slipped mechanically toward the empty hip-pocket beneath the skirt of his coat. He had halted. He moved on, into the dim recess whence some one was watching him, and presently emerged again, dragging after him into the firelight a shock-headed, pasty-faced lad, whose long neck was writhing in anguish as Captain Dove gave the long ear between his finger and thumb another fierce tweak.

"What the devil are *you* doing here!" the old man demanded, peering into the features of Mr. Jobling's managing clerk.

"Nothing," answered Mullins with legal exactitude. But he quickly became more discursive under Captain Dove's threatening glance. "Mr. Jobling brought me here

with him," he explained. "We arrived by the steamer an hour ago, after a most terrible passage. I never saw such — "

Captain Dove silenced him with a scowl. "Where's your master? " he demanded.

"In there," replied Mullins promptly, pointing to the door of the gun-room, which opened off the main hall; and Captain Dove, casting him loose without more words, marched in upon Mr. Jobling and Slyne in excited conference.

They looked round as the door opened, and the lawyer, seeing who the unceremonious intruder was, waved a fat hand in gleeful welcome. "We're safe now," he vociferated. "The Jura succession is settled at last. Where's Lady Josceline? She'll be Countess of Jura in her own right as soon as — "

"Not so much of your noise," Captain Dove commanded, and, suddenly, reopening the door, all but overset himself in accomplishing a hasty kick, which elicited a loud yelp from without.

"Was that Mullins! " Mr. Jobling exclaimed. "I don't know *what* I'm to do with him. He's really becoming a dangerous nuisance. I had to bring him away from London with me to prevent him — "

"He'll keep clear of keyholes for a while," Captain Dove put in confidently. "Now let's hear your news."

Mr. Jobling's clouded face cleared again. "You've heard it already," he said. "I've won our case. The Chancery Court has admitted my proofs. We are to attend again, all of us, the day after to-morrow if possible, when Mr. Justice Gaunt will give us decree. And Lady Josceline will be the Countess of Jura as soon as — "

" When will she get any money? " asked Captain Dove bluntly, and Mr. Jobling looked pained.

" By Friday, I should think," he stated, " I'll have everything in such shape that she can draw a cheque for a mill— "

" She'll draw no cheques," Slyne interrupted decisively. " You know very well that I have her formal authority to attend to all such matters for her. Whatever small sums she may require *I'll* procure for her, and any payments to be made on her behalf *I'll* make."

He met with perfect tranquillity the glances of his associates. " I'll go and tell her the news now," he remarked, and left the room.

As soon as the door had closed behind him, the lawyer turned toward Captain Dove, and, " Well? " he asked eagerly. " Was that your ship I saw at the mouth of the loch? How are you going to get rid of that domineering upstart? There isn't much time left to — "

Captain Dove held up a protesting hand, but Mr. Jobling would not be put down in that manner. He was evidently determined now to stand up for himself and those hard-earned rights out of which Slyne had undoubtedly jockeyed him in the most bare-faced, contemptuous manner.

" I really must insist on knowing what you mean to do," he declared irascibly. " I have far too much at stake to leave anything to chance at this late moment. Once Mr. Slyne reaches London, it will be too late to — "

" Hold your row! " ordered Captain Dove, so fiercely that Mr. Jobling jumped. " And — don't interfere in what doesn't concern you. All you need to know is that — Slyne will never see London again. Does that satisfy you? "

"It would — if I could believe it," observed Mr. Jobling, valiantly. "But — "

"And neither will you, if you worry me," added Captain Dove in a voice which seemed to affect his neighbour's nerve very adversely. "So help yourself to another peg and pass the bottle. I can scarcely hear myself think for your chatter, and I've got a good deal to think about."

Mr. Jobling did his very best to meet the old man's irate glance resolutely, but his own irresolute, blinking eyes soon fell before the cold menace in Captain Dove's. He replenished his glass, and having sulkily shoved the decanter across the table, lay back in his chair.

"You said that she could draw her money on Friday, didn't you?" asked Captain Dove, and he nodded, with very ill grace.

"And Slyne has her power of attorney to sign any cheques he likes to write," the old man went on musingly. "But — that doesn't matter. Brasse will be ashore to-night. And we'll be off to London to-morrow, me an' you, Jobling, d'ye hear?"

Mr. Jobling could not deny that he heard, and did not seem inclined to ask any more questions. But Captain Dove had a great many more to ask him, and when Slyne looked into the room, some time later, he found the two of them chatting quite amicably. They both fell silent, however, at sight of him.

"Lady Josceline is entertaining visitors," he announced: "the Duchess of Dawn — and that unlicked cub Ingoldsby."

"Lord Ingoldsby's her grace's nephew, of course," Mr. Jobling mentioned reverentially. "And one of the wealthiest peers in England — or anywhere else. But — how did

they get here? Dawn's on the other side of the mountains, and — "

"They rode across," said Slyne, "to find out who was here. If Dove hadn't ordered the beacon to be lighted the night we arrived, they'd never have heard — But maybe, after all, it will help —

"They're going to dine and stay the night, anyhow. It's come on to snow again.

"There's a great hullabaloo below-stairs," he said in a somewhat querulous tone as he crossed toward the fireplace and helped himself to a cigarette from the silver box on the mantel. "One of the gamekeepers sent in word that he had seen the 'white lady' about in the woods this afternoon. And now an hysterical housemaid is having fits in the servants' hall, on the insufficient ground that she had met the same mysterious personage in one of the passages a little ago. The whole outfit, in fact, are in the very devil of a fluster."

"How unfortunate!" exclaimed Mr. Jobling, while Captain Dove was still regarding Slyne with an expression of mingled doubt and dismay. "Nothing could have been more ill-timed, too — since her grace is going to honour us with her company. Every one about the place believes implicitly in that old superstition — and they say, you know, that the head of the family *has* died whenever the so-called 'white lady' has made her appearance."

Slyne laughed, and blew a cloud of smoke from his nostrils.

"Lady Josceline will outlast most of us," he declared with the utmost nonchalance. "And, in any case, I've dared anyone to breathe a word about it to her. We don't want our dinner spoiled with any nonsense of that sort."

Mr. Jobling got up to go, alleging that he was tired after his long journey and wanted a rest before dinner.

"Of course, it's all nonsense," he agreed, if with no great conviction. "But it won't be before to-morrow that you'll get the Highlanders here to believe that."

Slyne laughed again, contemptuously, as the lawyer left the room, and then turned toward Captain Dove.

"You don't believe in ghosts, do you, Dove?" he demanded, quite well aware of the old man's weakness in that respect.

"I've seen one or two in my time," answered that superstitious seaman in a low growl.

"You're luckier than I've ever been, then," said Slyne mockingly. "And I only believe in what I can see for myself. But, all the same, I'm not going to take any losing chances. And, you must admit, it would be most damnably awkward for us if Sallie should, by any chance, fall under the fatal spell of the family spectre."

Captain Dove gave voice to another growl, unintelligible, and moved restlessly in his chair. It had not, as a matter of fact, occurred to him that any immediate mischance to Sallie must mean ruin to himself. And Slyne's sneering insensibility was difficult to endure when he recalled what he himself had also seen in the woods.

"I think it would be as well in any case to make sure that we won't be left lamenting her and absolutely penniless," Slyne went on, his features suddenly set and serious. "And I'm going to make things safe for us all to-night," he affirmed. "Are you listening, Dove?

"It might be dangerous now to delay even until to-morrow. You and I have too much at stake to run any avoidable risk. And remember that, if you fail me again,

it isn't only a matter of the money you'll lose by your folly. I know very well that Jobling and you have been plotting together against me, but — I don't believe you've forgotten what I told you both the day before he left for London. It would scarcely be worth your while to go back on me now and spend the rest of your life in prison, or, much more probably, — hang."

Captain Dove nodded perfectly civil assent to that self-evident proposition. He was inwardly wondering at what hour Brasse would be ashore.

" Very well," Slyne concluded. " You've got to stand by me, for your own sake. I'm going to clinch matters with Sallie now. I'll announce our engagement at dinner. And immediately after dinner, she and I will go through the simple formality of a Scotch marriage — the worthy Mrs. M'Kissock has told me exactly how that can be done. The duchess will serve as one witness and I'll find another trustworthy one. So that, all going well, the future Countess of Jura will be my lawful wife before any harm can come to her even from the ' white lady.' How does that strike you, eh? "

Captain Dove once more nodded polite agreement, and then looked very slowly round over one shoulder behind him. Slyne darted an involuntary glance in the same direction, and the fag-end of his cigarette fell from between nerveless fingers. A sudden pallor had overspread his tanned features, and something very like fear looked out of his eyes at the dim white form standing motionless just beyond the range of the lamplight.

Something very like fear looked out of his eyes.

CHAPTER XXII

THE PARTY OF THE FIRST PART

THE shadow which had followed Captain Dove throughout his headlong flight from the hut on the cliffs had halted behind a bush at the edge of the wood while he lingered on the drawbridge to look back. As soon as he disappeared through the postern it flitted in the dusk across the gravel sweep in front of the castle, down into the dry moat and up again on the other side to a dark window: through which it gained easy ingress. And from that point, moving stealthily and with extreme precaution along the servants' passageways, it finally reached the housekeeper's quarters: where it stood listening intently for a few seconds before stepping in on Mrs. M'Kissock.

She was seated at her early supper, alone, and looked round in surprise, which quickly deepened into dire bewilderment and dread.

"Farish!" she whispered with pale lips, as he cast off the soiled and travel-worn white Arab cloak which had covered him, showing himself a big, bent, white-bearded, fierce-looking, haggard-faced fellow, barefooted, almost in rags. He was glancing about him with the expression of a wild beast in a cage while the old housekeeper gazed at him, breathing over-quickly, her hands at her heart.

"Ay, it's Farish, Janet," said he at length, in a very bitter voice, and threw himself wearily into a chair. "None

other than your ne'er-do-well brother, Farish, come home to die on your hands. I've been hiding in the woods all day, waiting a chance to creep in. I'm starving, too."

She turned, trembling sickly, to a full cupboard and set more food on the table in haste. He fell upon it like a famished wolf, and while he was devouring it they talked, in broken sentences.

"Where have you come from — in such a state?" the old woman asked, watching him with woe in her face.

"From hell," he mumbled hoarsely, his mouth full, "to square accounts with another devil who seems to have made the Castle of Loquhariot his home too. What's Dove, as he calls himself, doing here, Janet?"

"He came with the Lady Josceline Justice," Mrs. M'Kissock made difficult answer.

"He came with the Lady Josceline Justice!" repeated her brother mechanically, and ceased eating for an instant to stare at her out of blank, disbelieving eyes. Then he went on with his ravenous feast and his questioning. "Who else is here?"

"Mr. Slyne," his sister told him meekly, "and Mr. Jobling, her ladyship's London lawyer. The Duchess of Dawn and Lord Ingoldsby came across the Pass to call on her ladyship this afternoon. And there's Mr. Herries, too, ill in bed, as he's been since the night of her ladyship's coming."

"I know the man Slyne," muttered Farish M'Kissock. "But — what's Lady Josceline Justice like?"

He listened attentively to his sister's brief, fond description, and then pushed the plates from before him.

"Can you give me something to drink now?" he asked, in a strained, unsteady voice. She brought him a bottle

of wine from the cupboard and he swallowed some, very sparingly. It brought a little colour back into his ashen face.

"I'll eat some more in a minute or two," he muttered, and sank back into his chair, and sighed. And there he sat, still and silent, while the big grandfather's clock in its corner ticked away an eternity of suspense.

"And so it's — *her!*" he whispered to himself, and looked up at his sister again as if he had been unaware of her company.

"Listen, Janet," said he then, in a stronger voice, "and I'll tell you something of what I owe Dove.

"When I had to flee this country, at the time of Lord St. Just's death, I took to the sea for a while, and, knocking about the world, I chanced across Dove and his ship — the old *Fer de Lance* it was then. And I signed on with him — it was in San Thomé — for reasons that don't matter now. But he and I soon fell foul of each other — for reasons that don't matter either — and what d'ye think he did to get rid of me! He set me ashore, on the African coast, alone — to die in the desert there."

A dangerous light was beginning to burn in his sunken eyes. He had set his two twitching hands on the table, was leaning forward.

"But — I didn't die, after all, you see," he said. "I didn't die then, Janet. I'm not dead yet.

"It would only weary you to hear all that happened to me before I came into my kingdom. For I was as good as a king there, Janet, and —

"No, I'm not mad, though I might well be after all I've suffered through — him. It *was* a kingdom I'd made for myself before he came my way again. From Tripoli to the

Sus, my word was all but law, and there was scarcely a tribe but paid me tribute. The Sultan of Morocco himself would send me presents when I passed by. I've fought and beaten the French, time and again, in country they claim for their own. *They* knew the Emir El Farish, Janet, although you think that it's raving I am.

" But never mind that. What you'll understand better is that I had come to be a very rich man there. I had horses and camels by hundreds, and gold and jewels almost more than I had time to count, and an army of fine fighting men to keep them all safe. I had wealth as well as power, all but as much as I wanted of both, when Dove came slinking into my camp on the coast one dark night, like some dirty jackal.

" His ship was lying in the bight, and — I had business on board with him. I went off in a boat, with no more than two of my men, blind fool that I was!

" I might have known better," he mused very bitterly, " but —

" He struck me down from behind. He turned me and my men adrift, insensible, in an open boat.

" It blew out to sea. I lived, without food or water, for nearly a week before I was picked up by a passing steamer that took me to Spain, but the other two died.

" I was as good as a king in Africa, and — Look at me now! I've lost all — all but these rags, and I'm spent, as the Spaniards say. I can't go back to reclaim what was mine. And what will have happened among my people without me, I can scarcely bear to think. For I was fond of them, Janet, in my own way.

" But, after all, it's enough for me now that I've found

him again — and in time. I could scarcely believe that it was really him I saw by the hut."

He was speaking in a strange, far-away voice, almost contemplatively; and, while he spoke, he was fingering the hilt of the long sheath-knife at his frayed black belt.

" Would you do murder here again, Farish! " whispered his sister, her clasped hands still tight at her heart. She had heard him out in tense silence, without a word. " Was not once enough! Must I be the one to betray you now — lest you do murder here again! "

Her brother's gaunt features twisted slowly into a horrible grin, and relaxed again into an expression of some concern as he observed her evident stress of mind.

" It was no murder, but justice, that I did on Torquil St. Just," said he. " He would have killed me if he could. But I suppose they will always blame me for his death, Janet; and it would no doubt go hard with me, even after all these years, if any but you knew my whereabouts.

" But — I'm safe with you, Janet. And I'll do no murder, I give you my word. I have other means —

" I'm safe with you, Janet," he repeated, glancing about the quiet, lamp-lit room.

" None will enter without my leave," she hastened to reassure him. " You can stay safe here, Farish, till we can come at some plan to help each other, for I cannot bide in the castle for long either, now you've come back.

" But — you must work no more harm in the house whose bread I have eaten so long. Whatever hurt Torquil St. Just did you, he has long gone to his account, and you have surely no ill will to her ladyship. She has suffered sorely too, poor thing! in her time, or I'm much mistaken."

" When did she come to Loquhariot? " Farish demanded.

" Not much more than a fortnight ago — and just in time. For before her had come, from America, a far cousin, one Mr. Justin Carthew, to claim the rights that are hers, thinking, as I did indeed, that she must be dead."

" You *can't* mean yon whistling, limber fellow that walks with a limp? I saw him too at the hut," said the wreck in the chair at the table with a sudden, fierce, eager light in his lack-lustre eyes. " But — I took him for a ghost. How came *he* here? My men told me — "

His sister had nodded silently. She sat staring at him in abject suspense, hope and despair alternately flitting across her wrinkled face.

But he said nothing more for some time. That last unaccountable twist of fate had almost stupefied him.

A telephone bell rang behind his sister, and startled him out of his reverie.

" Mr. Slyne says her ladyship wishes rooms prepared for the duchess and Lord Ingoldsby," she told him as she turned back from the instrument. " And dinner's to be served in the banquet-hall. I must be off about my business now, Farish. Will you wait here till I come again — and promise to work no more harm? "

" I'll find a quieter corner to hide in," he answered indifferently. And, in response to her harassed glance, " You must just trust me to take care of myself and not trouble you more than need be," he told her. " I know this old vulture's-nest well enough not to be discovered in it. And — I'll do Dove no violence, Janet; you have my pledged word for that."

She lingered still, almost distracted, not knowing what to do for the best. But she did know, of old and sad expe-

rience, how little heed he was likely to pay to any advice or direction of hers, and at last had to hurry away to her duties leaving him, safe enough there, to his own devices till she could return.

As soon as she had gone, he swallowed a little more of the food and wine on the table, put on his dirty white robe again, pulling its baggy hood well over his features, and, having assured himself that the long passage down which she had disappeared was empty, set out with soundless but steadier steps to secrete himself in some more remote recess of the spacious castle.

He knew his way about every turn of the back-corridors intimately. He was passing the gun-room pantry when he heard from within a voice that he recognised at once, shouting, "Hold your row!" He paused. Distant footfalls in the passage prompted him to a swift decision. The pantry door was ajar. He pushed it a little further open, stepped inside, and closed it behind him.

The place was practically in darkness, but he soon found the service-wicket, and, having first made sure that he would not be intruded upon, slipped the blade of his knife under its wooden shutter, raised it, without sound, sufficiently to hear and see all that was going on in the gun-room.

His eyes began to gleam balefully as he looked through at its unsuspecting inmates. The old man Dove and the London lawyer were evidently at loggerheads, but presently calmed down again, and grew almost confidential together. And afterwards Slyne came in to them with his contemptuous story of the White Lady — at which the lurking listener frowned anxiously, since it went to show that he must have been seen notwithstanding all his precautions. And then the lawyer got up to go.

To Slyne's subsequent conversation with Captain Dove the ex-Emir listened no less greedily, licking his lips. And after that he pushed noiselessly past the swing-door of the pantry, into their company. He thought he could see his way quite clearly by then.

Slyne drew back in speechless alarm at sight of the gaunt, hooded figure coming forward on soundless feet. Captain Dove had made an attempt to rise, but apparently could not; he sat still, staring over one shoulder, aghast, at that grey ghost of a man he had never expected to see again.

Farish M'Kissock threw back his hood and mutely held out his two empty hands. Slyne let one of his own fall from a hip-pocket. Captain Dove was evidently striving to speak. The silent intruder stood waiting to hear whatever he might have to say.

"How can it be!" Captain Dove said at length, in the difficult voice of one amazed almost beyond words, and got to his feet with an effort, to scan the intruder still more searchingly, to stare transfixed at the tangled grey locks which had formerly been of a flaming red.

"It *is* — Farish!" he whispered fearfully, as if at last convinced in spite of himself. And the man before him nodded slowly, three times.

"None but me, Captain Brown — or Captain Dove — or whatever you care to call yourself," said Farish M'Kissock, and tried to moisten his dry lips with a dry tongue. "None but the man you have twice betrayed and turned adrift to die like a dog; once in the desert and yet again in a boat on the open sea."

"Didn't you get ashore?" Slyne asked softly, as if he thought that the mysterious new-comer must be mad, and did not desire to anger him.

" Sit down, both of you," said Farish M'Kissock, " and we'll talk together. 'Tis no more than meet that you should both know the why and the wherefore of what's to come. I will not seek to harm you," he said, and so sat down himself.

Slyne seated himself on the table and Captain Dove was content with an arm of the chair in which he had been ensconced; both were obviously prepared to spring up again instantly. And Farish M'Kissock looked at his leisure from one to the other of them before he said anything more. Captain Dove's unusual attire seemed to hold his attention.

" You've changed your coat since you saw me last," he at length remarked in an even, almost indifferent voice. " And you've come to a very snug anchorage. You're both going to settle down here and be gentlemen now, I suppose."

Captain Dove glared at him, but could not overmaster his steady glance and at last was compelled to seek shelter behind his smoked glasses, at which added disguise his enemy gazed with no less offensive interest.

" You have both done very well for yourselves," said Farish M'Kissock, and turned toward Slyne.

" You're going to marry the Lady Josceline Justice," said he. " And so — you'll be master here — of her and her millions. You'll be a rich man then — but not so rich, surely, as I'd have been if you two had kept your bargain with me; for I was not bankrupt when Captain Dove promised her to me — though I'm bankrupt now."

His slow speech stung, but they both heard him out in hang-dog silence.

" I'm bankrupt now," he repeated, looking over at Captain Dove. " All I won for myself in this world I've lost,

thanks to you. And so — I've made my way home, to die. They told me in the hospital that I hadn't long to live then, and I reckon my tramp across the mountains will help to finish me. But — first, there's our account to be squared; all I have lost."

"I'll make that up to you, Farish," said Captain Dove, finding his tongue again, and evidently anxious to be very diplomatic since he could by no means outface his former accomplice. "I'll do the right thing by you now. I hadn't any idea, you know, but that you'd get safely ashore and back to your camp — "

"It was a long chance you took, with the wind offshore," the other broke in, without raising his voice, in the same implacable monotone. "It was almost too long. But the boat you set me adrift in was picked up far out at sea, with two dead men in it, and one who was minded to live long enough to repay what he owes you.

"What has happened among my folks there, God alone knows. But they would fare ill without me, I fear, and — I had some liking for them."

"You've always been far too soft-hearted, Farish. That's your only fault," said Captain Dove encouragingly. "Forget them — and I'll make all the rest up to you."

"But how did you come here?" Slyne demanded with more spirit than he had at first shown.

He had to wait some time for an answer, but Captain Dove did not interrupt again, and presently the other proceeded to make that also more clear.

"You don't know yet who I am now," he muttered. "I had forgotten —

"I'm Farish M'Kissock, own brother to old Janet, the housekeeper here. And I was born at Loquhariot, after my

father came from Kilmarnock to be head-keeper to the old earl. That's why I call it home, though it's no home of mine.

" I left the last half of my name behind me when I fled the country, long years ago, at the time of Lord St. Just's death. I had a hand in that, although I did not murder him as some said. He had done me a foul wrong, the foulest one man may do another. It cost him his life, but — I did not murder him. That would have been but a poor revenge in my eyes. I would fain he had lived till this day."

" And what do you propose to do now? " Slyne asked, somewhat impatiently. He had evidently got over his first confusion.

The ex-Emir regarded him meditatively for a moment or two, and then broke into a low, mirthless laugh.

" You're going to marry the Lady Josceline Justice," said he, " and you're in a hurry. You've no time to waste on me — or on my memories of old wrongs. Well, I don't blame you. I once had a fancy for her myself, and — I was in just such a hurry; when my wife died in my arms as we carried her out from my camp, to suit your convenience, Captain Dove, and I hadn't even the time to bury my own dead wife decently before I put off to your ship in search of — the other. If I had been in less haste about it, I'd maybe have made better speed.

" But you've managed very well for yourself, so far, Mr. Slyne. Though you've robbed me of one who should have been mine, just as did Torquil St. Just.

" And now — if you'll wait for a minute more — I'll even matters among us; and you'll understand the drift of my story better. You've managed very well for yourself, so

far, and you've very nearly won all you wanted. But — here I am, just in time.

" Did it ever come out how the Countess of Jura, the dancer that was, met her death? "

Slyne, listening with strained attention now, nodded swift assent. Captain Dove, crouched low on his perch, was gazing at Farish M'Kissock as if fascinated.

" She shot herself," said the ex-Emir, with the calm certainty of one who can vouch for his facts, " rather than fall into the hands of my men. We had raided a camp of fool tourists who had come too far afield, to find out what the real desert was like, and she was among them. She saw me before she pulled trigger, and knew me, and cried on me to save her child.

" All the rest were — wiped out. But — I spared the child, because — it had the Jura blood in its veins. It was the Lady Josceline Justice, and she grew up among our tents until she died in my arms the same night I made my unlucky bargain with you, Captain Dove; and I hadn't even the time to bury her ladyship, my dead wife, decently before I put off to your ship! "

He drew a skeleton-like hand across his sunken eyes and blinked at the blazing logs on the hearth before him.

" And now you know where the real Lady Josceline Justice is," said he.

CHAPTER XXIII

A NEW IDEA

"AND now you know where the real Lady Josceline Justice is," said Farish M'Kissock drearily, almost as if the savour of his overwhelming revenge on all who had wronged him had cloyed already. "The girl you have here — "

"Never mind about her," Captain Dove interrupted hoarsely, and darted a quick, furtive glance at Slyne, who looked very much as if he had just been struck on the back of the head with a hammer. "What are you going to do about it? That's all we want to hear from you."

He had been scarcely less overcome by that most calamitous disclosure than was his unhappy accomplice. And he did not doubt for a moment that Farish M'Kissock was speaking the truth; although until then he himself had been almost convinced that Sallie must indeed be the dead Earl of Jura's daughter. That possibility had been proven so perfectly probable that even the Court of Chancery had accepted it for a fact. But now —

The sudden and cataclysmic collapse of all his own prospects along with hers had spurred Captain Dove's momentarily stunned faculties into a perfect frenzy.

"What are you going to do about it?" he demanded again, imperatively, since the other was slow to answer.

"I need do nothing more — to thwart your fine schemes,"

said Farish M'Kissock quietly: "for — they will fail. Although it matters little to me now who may rule here, since the last of the old brood lies dead and unburied in Africa; and she was fond of me, too, as I was of her. 'Twas a notable revenge that I took on *them*-all! And I think ye'll allow that I've settled old scores handsomely with the both of you two as well.

"You might maybe murder me yet, to still my tongue, as you're thinking, but that would end as ill for yourselves, and I'm not here for long anyhow. There's nothing in this world or the next that will avail you against me now, and — "

His voice died away, wearily. He was gazing into the flickering flames, brooding over his own desperate memories.

"I might murder you, as you say, and in self-defence at that, Farish," replied Captain Dove, in a tone that he was striving to make more friendly. "But — how would it be if we went partners instead? What's the use of cutting your nose off to spite your face? There's surely enough here for all of us. And your share would more than make up to you for — "

The gaunt wreck in the arm-chair beside the fire broke into a low, mocking laugh.

"It's to close my account with you that I'm here, Captain Dove," said he implacably, "and not to open a new one."

Captain Dove, his face distorted with impotent fury, darted another devilish look at Slyne, but Slyne was still sitting motionless, staring at the ex-Emir, like one in a trance. Captain Dove glanced again at the stooping figure on the other side of the fireplace, set one foot firm on the floor, and leaped at his enemy like a wild beast.

Farish M'Kissock fought fiercely, with a strength surprising in one of his enfeebled appearance, had almost succeeded, indeed, in freeing himself from the old man's vice-like grip before Slyne at last awoke from his lethargy and, of mechanical instinct, came to Captain Dove's assistance. The two of them soon got him down, and then Captain Dove lashed his wrists and ankles securely with a strong fishing-line snatched from a rack on the wall.

"This way with him now," he panted, and, drawing aside a blind panel in the wainscot of the near wall, disclosed a low, wide opening, toward which he pulled their prostrate prisoner by the heels. And together they bundled the groaning body down a steep flight of dry stone steps, into an unlighted cell at one side of the dark tunnel below.

"He'll be safe enough in there," said Captain Dove vindictively, as he held up the match he had struck while Slyne, with fumbling fingers, drew its rusty iron outside bolt across the door of the cell. "And it will be easy to get him down the tunnel to the water-gate, too."

"Can anyone get in by the water-gate?" asked Slyne in a breathless whisper.

"I have the key in my pocket," Captain Dove answered shortly, and drew the blind panel back into place as they regained the gun-room together.

There, he made at once for the half-empty decanter upon the table. But Slyne sat down before the fire again, with bent head, as if utterly crushed.

It was self-evident that he had come to believe implicitly in Sallie's right to the new identity he had bestowed upon her, had never doubted that the proofs on which that belief had been based were anything but genuine. He could scarcely doubt now that Captain Dove had hoodwinked

him from first to last, that Farish M'Kissock's story was the real truth of the matter. And, thus in a moment confronted with the ruinous outcome of his credulity, he could not yet bring his mind to bear on anything but the utter eclipse of all his own golden dreams.

"And so — that fellow Carthew will be Earl of Jura," he said suddenly, and looked up at Captain Dove with a hell of hate aflame behind his dull eyes. "And you've been lying to me all along," he said, in a still, dispassionate voice.

Captain Dove, back in his own chair, better pleased with himself, paused to consider before replying. He had been investigating the pantry and found out how Farish M'Kissock had come there.

"You're wrong, both times," he at length remarked. "I've told you nothing that wasn't the truth. All I've said about Sallie, I can prove up to the hilt. And, anyhow, you've been managing the whole business. You've told me often enough not to butt in! You can't blame *me* for any mistake that's been made.

"And, what's more," he went on, marshalling his ideas, "it remains to be proved that there *has* been any mistake. You're surely not going to take the mere word of a fellow like Farish for that — a mutinous second mate I had to maroon to get rid of him. Anyhow, if you're going to lie down and die at his orders, I'm not. D'ye see?"

Slyne drew a shaky hand across a damp forehead. He was obviously all unstrung.

"You didn't cast any doubt on his story," he muttered.

"There was no need," declared Captain Dove. "Let him disprove yours first. It was you who discovered who Sallie should be. I had no idea whose daughter she was — and neither had she. You and Jobling it was who put two

and two together and made out four. I don't believe Farish — M'Kissock, as he calls himself now — could better that."

"Don't you believe what he said?" asked Slyne.

"Not me," lied Captain Dove. "The man's mad, that's what's the matter with him. He's probably made the whole thing up, just to get even with us, and knowing that we could do little more than contradict it. But — he didn't know that we have the Chancery Court behind us now. And that makes all the difference. We've won — and he's lost. D'ye see?

"I was scared at first, I'll admit — when he walked in. It was that infernal 'white lady' tale of yours that upset me. But — *you* don't believe in ghosts! What's wrong with you is sheer funk."

But even that insult seemed to have no immediate effect on Slyne, and Captain Dove got up, growling.

"Here," said he. "Drink this down — and try if you can't muster even a little Dutch courage."

Slyne swallowed, still without a word in retort, the dose of spirit which the old man had poured out for him; and that seemed to restore a little his crippled self-confidence. Some faint spark of hope that all might not yet be lost seemed to have sprung up in his heavy heart. His benumbed brain was apparently beginning to work again. He sat up, with an effort.

"But — how are we to carry on here?" he asked, in a tone which told how very feeble his faith was. "If any such story gets to the ears of — "

"It will get no farther than it has gone," declared Captain Dove with assured emphasis. "If Farish hasn't told that old hag of a sister of his yet, it stays between you and

me. We'll make sure of her silence — and his. That will be easy enough."

Slyne sank back into his chair again, and scowled. He did not affect to misunderstand his companion's sinister promptings.

"Will you undertake to look after them, then?" he stipulated, with dire distaste, after further consideration.

Captain Dove in his turn took time to cogitate over that selfish suggestion. He had no intention whatever of helping Slyne at his own hazard. On the contrary, he had already made up his mind to get rid of Slyne at the same time as the other two. But, of course, it was only politic to pretend a little reluctance.

"All right," he agreed at length. "I'll look after them. But you must lend me a hand, if it's necessary. There's no one else I can trust, and we're both in the same boat now. You must lend me a hand, if it's necessary."

"And what about Carthew?" Slyne demanded, recovering himself by degrees under the old man's most matter of fact example. "If he should get any inkling — "

"Oh, don't *make* difficulties!" growled Captain Dove. "What's to hinder our settling his hash the same way as the others? There are only the three of them in our way. We'll make a clean sweep. We'll get him up here — we'll send him word that Sallie would like to see him, and — the rest will be easy."

"But, good God!" cried Slyne, "how are you going to account for their disappearance? It's madness — "

"Farish is mad, all right," said Captain Dove reflectively. "Which will account for whatever happens to him and his precious sister. If they were both found with broken necks at the foot of this infernal rock, who's going

to make us responsible? And, as for that fellow Carthew, if we can't explain away his disappearance we'll deserve to lose everything, Slyne.

"Damn it, man! What are you afraid of! Are you going to throw up the sponge just before the fight's won!"

"If we *were* once clear of the three of them, that would leave us perfectly safe," said Slyne, in a voice that was not very steady. "But what if Mrs. M'Kissock knows already —"

"We'll ring for her now and find out," answered Captain Dove with savage decision. "If she seems to know more than she should — she can keep her infernal brother company until Brasse comes ashore."

He rose, and had almost reached the bell-push beside the mantel when the door opened and the Marquis of Ingoldsby walked into the room, looking much less imbecile and more of a man in his splashed breeches and boots and spurs.

Captain Dove glared at him.

"Howdy do, Captain Dubb," said his lordship, politely, after peering through his eye-glass at Slyne. "Glad to see you again. Lady Josceline told me I would probably find you here, and — I want to talk to you — about her."

He let his eyeglass drop and helped himself to a brandy and soda. Slyne was staring at him. Captain Dove was dumb.

"I've just been askin' her to marry me," his lordship remarked, after slaking his thirst. And, as he paused to light a cigarette, "The devil you have!" exclaimed Captain Dove, considering that idea.

"She said she couldn't," Lord Ingoldsby mentioned, straddling across the hearth-rug, his hands on his hips, dis-

regarding Slyne's presence entirely now. "But — she wouldn't tell me why. And I thought I'd ask you, don't y'know. So far as I can understand, you're her nearest livin' relative — her stepfather, or godfather, or somethin' of that sort, what? And I thought that maybe you wouldn't mind talkin' over the matter with me."

Captain Dove scratched his head. He could see that Slyne was watching him very closely. It had no doubt flashed through Slyne's mind as through his own that here was a providential by-path of escape, for him at least, from his present predicament; that, if all else went askew, Sallie might prove profitable enough, to him at least, as the Marchioness of Ingoldsby. For had not Mr. Jobling stated that the young man before the fire was one of the wealthiest peers in England or elsewhere.

"I don't want to over-hurry her, y'know," said the noble marquis, "and, maybe, I've been a bit sudden. But I've been huntin' high and low for her ever since I last saw her, and — here I am, don't y'know. So I thought I'd ask her."

"Didn't you hear me tell you in Monte Carlo that Lady Josceline is engaged to marry me?" Slyne broke in, with a sudden access of anger, since Captain Dove still seemed to have nothing to say.

"That's so," said Captain Dove slowly. "She's engaged to this gentleman — on conditions."

Lord Ingoldsby screwed his eyeglass into his face and gravely regarded Slyne again.

"But she's not married to him yet," said he. "And — it's a woman's privilege to change her mind. Besides, if her engagement is only conditional — "

"We needn't discuss it just now," Captain Dove put in

with unusual diplomacy. He could see that Slyne was liable to explode dangerously at any moment.

"All right, then," said Lord Ingoldsby in a tone of great determination. "I'll just have to do the best I can for myself." And, having finished his light refreshment, he strolled off again, taking not the slightest notice of Slyne's very obvious indignation.

As soon as he was safely out of earshot, Slyne fell foul of Captain Dove, who listened patiently enough to all he had to say.

"But I'm *not* interfering," said the old man. "All that sort of thing lies between you and her, Slyne. If you can get her to marry you right away — "

"Of course I can — if you back me up," Slyne declared wrathfully. "And you've got to do that now, Dove — for your own sake. We're both in the same boat, remember, — and if it upsets, we'll both drown. I'll make quite sure of that.

"So — we'll get hold of Sallie now before the thing goes any further — and settle that question for good."

CHAPTER XXIV

BY RIGHT OF PURCHASE

SALLIE had been far too happily occupied since she had come to Loquhariot to have been conscious of the wheels within wheels revolving about her there.

She could scarcely at once accustom herself to look upon the great, grey, age-old castle as her home; but there was Janet M'Kissock always eager to help her in that respect, with endless stories of bygone days which made the place seem always more familiar and friendly to her. She grew, by degrees, to know and love it almost as if she had lived there all her life.

It was much more difficult to grasp the idea that the whole of the beautiful white world beyond its windows was also hers, and hers alone; from the rugged, snow-clad mountains towering behind and on either hand, even to the Small Isles, like bergs in the sun amid the smoking seas in that turbulent weather. But Slyne missed no opportunity to impress that important fact upon her. And she was finding it always easier to forget her unhappy past, to enjoy the marvellous present and the most inspiriting part in it, to leave the over-difficult future to evolve itself.

The men and women about the place were all devoted to her. She had very soon won the staunch good-will of the cottagers at the cliff-foot. And her soft sway was everywhere undisputed, although Slyne had at first been inclined

to contest it himself. But he soon seemed to realise that it would be best, in the meantime, to order events from the background and in her voice.

He had shown some disposition, too, to question the extent of the liberty she might now assume to herself. But he had not pressed that point unduly either, and they continued on that footing of pleasant comradeship which he had been at such ceaseless pains to promote. His debonair courtesy to her, his easy deference to most of her wishes, were very different indeed from his off-hand manner of former days. And she could not but be grateful to him, in the meantime, for the almost over-ample fulfilment of his original promise.

Regarding her pledge to him, he had said nothing more, although she spent long afternoons and evenings in his company when the weather was at its worst, while Mr. Jobling was away. Captain Dove left the two of them very much to themselves, and Slyne had offered to teach her to play billiards, to pass the time.

She would have been entirely content, indeed, but for the hardship her coming had entailed on Justin Carthew. She had met him more than once out of doors, and he had always seemed pleased to see her, but — it was of common report that he was a poor man, and she could not help feeling that he had shown himself very much more generous to her than she to him. She found comfort, however, in the conclusion that circumstances were quite beyond her control, and that he would understand better by and by the complications through which she had had to find her way as best she could.

She had gone down to the village on the afternoon when the *Olive Branch* arrived in the loch, and she walked back

as far as the castle with Carthew. The reappearance of that ill-omened craft had alarmed her more than a little, and she could see that Carthew was becoming always more sorely puzzled. But he had promised her to await events without question for three short months; and he was keeping his promise loyally. She could have told him nothing, in any case.

She met Slyne in the hall, on her way indoors, and he reassured her as to her perfect safety from any further risk of evil-doing by Captain Dove. He pointed out, too, that the steamer's crew was too scanty now to cope with the force he could call to her aid from the village in case the old man should attempt to make any mischief, which was most unlikely. And she went on to her own cosy quarters, quite content again.

She was changing her outdoor dress for one of her pretty Parisian tea-gowns, when word was brought her that the Duchess of Dawn and Lord Ingoldsby had come across the mountains to pay her a call.

She remembered Lord Ingoldsby, and wondered what could have brought him to Loquhariot. The idea of entertaining a duchess dismayed her a little; she had no notion at all what the conventions called for under circumstances so unusual in her own experience — although Slyne had been at some pains to explain a number of other conventions to her. But she went along to the blue drawing-room at once, and was relieved to find Slyne there before her, unconcernedly chatting with a very beautiful young woman in a sadly splashed habit, her back to the fire, booted feet a little apart, hunting-crop in clasped hands, laughter in her clear eyes; while Lord Ingoldsby, looking much less imbecile and more

of a man in his travel-soiled riding-kit, stood listening gloomily.

His face cleared at sight of Sallie, however. "Here's Lady Josceline, Aunt Jane," he cried, and the duchess, after a single swift, appraising glance at her, came forward with outstretched hands and kissed her without any more ado.

"Oh! my dear," said the duchess impulsively, "you can't imagine what a relief you are. Ingoldsby has been simply raving about you, and — I was so anxious, don't you know. But I don't blame him now.

"I've seen you before, too — one night at the Savoy. If I had only known then who you were — But some one said you were a Miss Harris! You've kept it all such a close secret! We wouldn't have known even now if we hadn't heard, quite by chance, that the beacon had been lighted one night. And we've been wondering ever since — So you must tell me all about everything now, if you will." And she drew Sallie down beside her on a low couch at one side of the white marble fireplace, leaving the two men to their own devices while she went on to explain herself no less volubly.

"It was madness, of course, to cross the Pass in weather like this, but — Ingoldsby would give me no peace; and I've been *so* curious myself to find out who could be here. I'm your nearest neighbour, you know, although Castle Dawn is ten miles away; those are worse than twenty anywhere else. So, when the rain stopped this forenoon we set out — and here we are, covered with mud! The road's in a dreadful state, but you must come over and stay with me as soon as the bridges are mended. We're going to be great friends. I knew your father — although I'm not quite so old as you might imagine from that, for I wasn't

out of short petticoats the last time he spoke to me. And, as for being the aunt of that scapegrace there, he's five years older than I am in years — and fifty in — "

" Don't be too rough on a fellah, Aunt Jane! " interrupted her noble nephew, who had been regarding Sallie with fixed vacuity through his eyeglass. " An' don't you believe all you hear about me, Lady Josceline: I'm not so black as I'm painted, at any rate."

" He's been simply raving about you," the duchess declared again, in a laughing whisper. " I couldn't imagine what had brought him down to Dawn in midwinter, until he confided in me that he had been searching the wide world for you ever since he met you first: and he imagined that you might, after all, be here, at home."

She had a great many questions to ask Sallie then, questions which Sallie, in such a situation, might have found it very difficult to answer but for Jasper Slyne's sharp ears and tactful tongue. And the duchess was not slow to understand.

" Of course you can't confide in me yet," she declared laughingly. " But some day you must tell me all your adventures. Your home-coming after all these years will make a nine days' wonder once the papers get to hear of it."

A servant came in to light the lamps, and Slyne sauntered to a window before the curtains were drawn.

" It's snowing again, Ingoldsby," said he. " You won't get back to Dawn to-night."

The duchess looked a little alarmed, but was soon laughing again.

" All right," she agreed, in response to Sallie's prompt proffer of hospitality. " I'll be most happy to stay overnight — and so will Ingoldsby, I'm sure."

"I'll go and let Mrs. M'Kissock know," Slyne volunteered. "Will you look into the gun-room when you pass, Lady Josceline?"

"Is old Janet still here?" the duchess asked as he left the room. "I must have a chat with her. She and I used to be great friends before — when Torquil St. Just was still alive and my mother would bring me over to Loquhariot when she came to call on yours. I was Jane Gairloch in those days."

Lord Ingoldsby sat listening very patiently for a time while they talked to each other, and then he became possessed by a strangled cough — to which the duchess paid no attention.

"You might give a fellah a chance, Aunt Jane," he at length suggested desperately, and she rose from the couch with a most penitent expression.

"Bless my heart, child!" she said. "I had almost forgotten — But — I'll go and talk to old Janet now." And she disappeared without other apology.

Sallie looked surprised. But Lord Ingoldsby, having cleared his throat again, claimed her attention.

"You've no idea, Lady Josceline," he said hurriedly, "what a deuce of a bât I've been in for nearly a fortnight. I was afraid I'd never find you again. And, now that I've found you, don't y'know, what I want to say to you is — It's very difficult to express — But I mean — What I'm trying to tell you is that I thought we might maybe make a match of it. Will you marry me, Lady Josceline?"

Sallie looked still more surprised. But she was not slow in answering such a preposterous question.

"I can't," she said, concisely.

"But why not?" he cried. "For heaven's sake! don't go so fast. Give me time to —"

"Time couldn't make any difference," she said, seeing that he was very much in earnest. "I can't —"

"But — why not?" he insisted. "Is — is there some one else already? It's not that fellah I met in Monte Carlo with you, I'm sure; he's such a rank outsider — you *couldn't* care for him, I'm sure. And why not give me just a chance to show you —

"There's nothing I wouldn't do for you, Lady Josceline. Give me just a chance."

"I can't," she repeated for the third time, and he stared at her as if in abject despair.

"Why can't you?" he demanded in a difficult, husky voice.

She could scarcely answer that question, a question which he had no right to ask. But — she felt sorry for him in his very obvious disappointment.

"If you care to ask Captain Dove, perhaps he will tell you," she said, unable to think of any other safe way out of that difficulty, and not caring very much what Captain Dove might say.

But Lord Ingoldsby was not so easily to be got rid of. He stayed where he was, arguing and imploring by turns until his youthful aunt appeared again, looking somewhat serious; she seemed to take in the situation between them at a shrewd glance.

He left the room then for a little, and when he returned Sallie and the duchess were on the point of retiring.

"I'm going to have a hot bath and a rest before dinner, Ingoldsby," his aunt informed him.

"Your rooms will be ready now, too," Sallie added,

unwilling to be left alone there with him again. And he went off, very glumly, under convoy of a servant, toward the bachelor apartments in the Warder's Tower.

Sallie saw the duchess settled in the suite which had been prepared for her, and having provided her with a plentiful choice of evening frocks, went on to the gun-room, to see what Slyne wanted with her.

Captain Dove and he were seated on either side of the fireplace, and looked round rather uncertainly as she came into the room.

" I've made the duchess quite comfortable, Jasper," she said with a smile, " and she's been exceedingly nice to me. I hope you'll look as well after Lord Ingoldsby."

" I've told them to give him the run of my wardrobe," Slyne answered indifferently. " So he'll be all right.

" And — what I wanted to say to you, Sallie, is that — I've just heard — All my hard work for you has been successful at last," he stammered, in a changed voice. " The claim I made for you has been allowed by the law. We're all going up to London to-morrow to get matters finally settled, and then — you'll be Countess of Jura in your own right."

He paused, effectively. Captain Dove was glancing from one to the other of them with judicial gravity.

" So that you can keep your promise to me now, without any further delay," said Slyne. " I want you to tell the others at dinner to-night — that you've chosen me for your husband."

The happy light in her eyes died out instantly. A faint frown furrowed her smooth white forehead. Her curved lips trembled a little. The old unhappiness and dread were plucking at her heart again. But she did not shirk the issue.

"But you agreed to wait — for three months, Jasper," she said in a low, pleading voice.

"That was only in case it took so long to fix things up for you," he lied easily. "Our signed agreement makes that quite clear, and it's absolutely binding, you know. Mr. Jobling will tell you that — and he's a lawyer."

She was gazing at him with something very like horror in her wide eyes.

"Was that in the paper I signed?" she asked breathlessly. But her lips had grown set and resolute. "I thought — "

"You must have misunderstood me, then," Slyne interrupted with assumed impatience. "But — you signed it of your own free will, before responsible witnesses. I've kept my part of our bargain; and now — you must keep yours, or the law will make you."

Her heart was beating almost painfully. To her, in her ignorance, the law was merely an instrument of injustice. She believed herself to be bound without hope of release by the document she had signed, and that the same inexorable law which had, only the other day, ruined Justin Carthew to raise her up in his place, would now force her to abide by whatever was written above her disastrous signature. The whole fair fabric of that wonderful new world to which she had so recently gained admittance had in these minutes come tumbling about her ears. And the crash of its falling palaces left her helpless and stupefied. She looked dizzily round at Captain Dove. But his features were quite unreadable.

"There's another point, Sallie," said Slyne, all his quick wits at work again as he saw the impression his words had made, determined to hammer home every argument that

might weigh with her in her ignorance, " another point that I'd never have mentioned if you had been prepared to deal fairly with me after all I've done for you."

She shivered at that further thrust; she, who had never dealt unfairly with either friend or enemy.

" Even without your promise, you're mine — by right of purchase. You were Captain Dove's property before, as you know very well. He bought you and paid for you. And he sold you to me, to save you from a worse master.

" You can't say now that you didn't know what was ahead of you, for I told you, in Genoa. And I gave you a last chance, too, before we left Monte Carlo, to draw back and go your own way with him. Now you're doubly mine. Ask him, if you don't believe me."

The girl glanced in agonised appeal at the old man sitting motionless in his chair, his eyes on the ground. But Captain Dove merely nodded, like some mechanical figure.

Slyne scowled, as if at an end of his patience, and, striding across to the door, locked it, pocketing the key.

" However," said he, " I'm not going to argue with you. I've evidently wasted my time in treating you reasonably. Now, there are only two courses open to you. You can come my way, with me, or — "

He crossed the room again and pulled back the loose panel in the wainscot, pointed to the dark cavity it had concealed.

" There's a boat from the *Olive Branch* at the water-gate at the end of this passage. You're perfectly free to go back on board with Captain Dove, and — if you do, I wish you joy of your choice. I'm maybe not much of a catch as a husband, but — " He left the inference unspoken, significantly, daring her to go back to that dreadful fate by

hinting at which he had once before forced her to change her mind.

Captain Dove got on to his feet with a puzzled scowl. Slyne had turned aside, to light a couple of candles, as if in preparation for a descent underground.

Captain Dove slowly drew the back of one hand across his mouth and from behind it whispered a few words to Sallie. "Humour him just now," he advised with suppressed vehemence. "I'll see you safe."

"Well?" Slyne demanded and came toward her. "Which is it to be? Time's up."

His hands hung open but tense at his sides. His teeth were set between parted lips, his knees bent a little as he braced himself to spring at her wrists before she could make any movement in self-defence. Captain Dove had stepped up behind her and she did not doubt that, unless she fell in with their wishes, they meant now to overpower her and carry her off.

She did not move for a moment, but her clouded eyes slowly cleared, and Slyne, studying her features intently, relaxed his own strained attitude a little as if in foreknowledge of final success.

Sallie's expression of utter despair had given place to one of resignation, almost of peace. She had made up her mind to have done with the seemingly endless, unequal struggle.

"Very well, Jasper," she said slowly at last, in a very hurtful voice. "You may tell the others — whatever you like — at dinner to-night, if you'll wait till then."

Captain Dove drew back and returned to his chair, as if satisfied for the moment. Slyne's dogged glance had dropped before the tragedy in her eyes.

"You can surely trust me, Sallie," he said, "after all I've done for you. And, listen! I'm not trying to rush you, either. If you'll tell the others at dinner to-night just that you take me for your husband — I'll wait till the end of the three months for our real wedding in church."

She could not quite understand what he really wanted, and looked her perplexity. But her mind was made up. She meant to keep any promise she might have made him, whether in writing or otherwise, and even mistakenly.

"Will you let me go now?" she begged brokenly, and he went to open the door for her.

"You'll say nothing about it to anyone till — the time comes," he stipulated before he would turn the key, and to that also she agreed with a nod, not trusting herself to speak.

She was very thankful that she met no one on her way to her own rooms, for her eyes were wet. She had never felt so utterly forlorn and friendless as now. There was no one in whom she might safely confide, no one who could help her safely past the promise into which she had been tricked, that promise to which, she did not doubt, the law would hold her firmly. And, in any case, she could not have gone back on board the *Olive Branch* — to a fate even worse.

Ambrizette was awaiting her, to dress her for dinner, but, on a sudden impulse, she sat down at the escritoire in her boudoir to write a few hurried lines to Carthew. She thought she would like to see him again, before —

Her letter ready, she bade Ambrizette ring the bell. It was the maid Mairi who answered it, and, when Sallie looked up again, she saw that the girl was silently crying.

"What's the matter, Mairi?" she asked in her gentle voice, forgetting her own cruel cares for the moment, and

at that the half-hysterical maid broke into a storm of unintelligible explanations in Gaelic, with here and there a broken sentence that Sallie could understand.

Her heavy-hearted mistress rose and put a protecting arm about her.

"You must tell me what the trouble is," said Sallie softly, "and I'll try to help you. What is it that has gone wrong?"

"*Ochon — ochon — ochanorie!*" the girl sobbed. "It is for your ladyship — not for me — and I was not to tell you, whatever. But — it is not right at all that I must not speak. Your ladyship should be told in time — it is that the White Lady has come to the castle again — and — there will be doom to follow before daylight. *Ochon, ochon!*"

Sallie shivered in spite of herself, as she recalled the uncanny legend which Mr. Jobling had related on the evening of their arrival. She had scarcely thought of it since, but now —

"Who has seen the White Lady, Mairi?" she asked patiently, and the girl grew a little calmer.

"I, with my own eyes, your ladyship," she declared. "It was at a turn of the passage not far from Mistress M'Kissock's room. And I did not run from it, moreover. I stood and watched till it disappeared, for I was afraid to move. And Mistress M'Kissock will say that it is all havers and nonsense, but I am sure. For it was seen in the woods as well, on the way to the hut that was Lord St. Just's, and Donuil Mohr, the forester, it was who saw it there."

Sallie sighed. She did not know what to think of it all, she who had so much else to think about. But she com-

forted the distressed Mairi, and presently sent her off on her errand, dry-eyed at last, and with word for the other servants that her ladyship was not in the least afraid of any such shadow seen in the dusk.

Sallie had almost forgotten the matter, indeed, before Ambrizette — much exercised in her mind by her beloved mistress's very evident and unusual preoccupation — had finished brushing out her beautiful hair and heaped it about her bent head in a heavy red-gold crown. When her toilette was quite complete, she looked wistfully round the luxurious rooms in which she had dreamed such happy dreams, and then went quietly through, a tall, slender, white-robed figure herself in the firelight, to one of the windows that look down Loch Jura and out to sea. She stopped there, and stayed for a time gazing out at the silver sheen of the ripple among which the Small Isles were set. The snow had ceased for the moment, but it looked as if there were more to come.

She looked directly downward, at the quiet village below. There was only a single light visible, and that at the inn. It was suddenly extinguished and Sallie turned away from the window.

"I wonder — I think he will come," she told herself, if a little doubtfully, as she passed through her boudoir again on her way to rejoin her guests; she paused for an instant to throw two warm, white arms about Ambrizette watching her as she went, out of dog-like eyes with a world of dumb devotion in them.

"I think he will come," she encouraged herself as she entered the distant drawing-room. "He promised —

"Oh, Mr. Herries!"

She had stopped, a little startled, at sight of the solitary

figure before the fire. But it was none other than the old factor, a very cadaverous spectacle in evening clothes much too ample for one so emaciated, who came forward with a hasty apology for his intrusion.

"I'm quite well again now," he assured her, in reply to her anxious questions, "and — I thought I would risk taking the liberty — if you will grant me permission to sit at table with you to-night. I always had that privilege with the earl."

Sallie thought she knew his real reason for being there, and it touched her sore heart to think that he was so eager to be at her side, sick or well, while the strange portent of which Mairi had told her was still impending.

"Do you really believe in the White Lady, Mr. Herries?" she asked with a little laugh that was half a sigh, as she put her hands into his and so set him down on a chair.

"I couldn't exactly say either yes or no," the old man answered with native caution. "But, at any rate, I've never seen — any such nonsense myself."

"I don't," declared Sallie, with simple conviction, and, turning as some one else entered the room, "He *will* come," said she to herself.

CHAPTER XXV

THE WHITE LADY

AS Carthew, at the brink of the smooth plateau before the hut on the cliffs looked round instinctively, he caught sight of a tall white shadow that seemed to be moving toward him through the gloom among the tree-trunks. The evening was drawing in. He had thought he was quite alone there. He went round outside the hut to see what that stealthy shape might be.

He heard a sudden rustling not far away, and saw Captain Dove spring up from behind a bush to gaze about apprehensively. It flashed across his mind that Captain Dove must have been dogging him. He stayed where he was, watching the old man's precipitate flight followed by the figure in cloak and hood, which had darted a horrified, disbelieving glance of recognition at himself as it passed but was evidently too intent on its pursuit to pause.

Carthew had recognised it too, although it passed his understanding altogether to conceive how his own old enemy could have come to Loquhariot. He was, indeed, so taken aback at sight of the Emir El Farish there, and in such a state, that it was some minutes later before he had recovered his wits sufficiently to follow the trail of the strange chase he had witnessed.

He was too late then, and it was already dark. But he ranged the woods for some time before he would give up

his anxious quest. He felt very much inclined to call at the castle and come to some understanding with Captain Dove. But — his promise to Sallie prevented him. He must keep that at all costs. Until the three months' grace she had begged should be up, he must continue to possess his soul in patience — or otherwise.

But now — that would be even more difficult than it had lately become. For, until now, he had quietly acquiesced in all that had happened because he could not help either her or himself. But now — the proof he had lacked could be obtained — from El Farish; proof that Sallie was usurping a dead woman's name and place.

He walked down the hill to the inn with his chin on his chest, wondering what the upshot would be if he should take Sallie herself into his confidence. But he was afraid to do that. He felt almost sure that, if she found out from him how she herself had been imposed upon, he might forthwith give up his dearest hope.

On the little green board in the hallway of the Jura Arms, he found two letters awaiting him. The steamer which had arrived that afternoon had evidently brought a belated mail. He noticed incuriously that his two correspondents were Messrs. Bolder & Bolder, of Lincoln's Inn Fields, London, W. C., and the Western lawyer who had arranged the mortgage of his ranch. Then he laid the letters aside and sat down on the edge of his truckle-bed with a pipe.

A little later the maid-of-all-work knocked at his door with a note from the castle. He opened it and read it at once. Then he called after her to order a conveyance for him, and began to hunt out his evening clothes in a hurry. He had only half an hour in which to change and get to the

castle again. He was going to dine there, with Sallie — who signed her name as Josceline Justice.

All the previous timid invitations which she had extended to him when he had chanced to meet her out of doors he had refused. But to-night he felt that it might be unwise to absent himself — some premonition of trouble impending caused him to frown at himself in his glass as he hastily patted a white tie into its place.

He paused to open his mail before leaving his room. The first letter briefly begged to inform him that the mortgage on his ranch had not been met on the due date and, failing an immediate remittance, must be called in with all costs. The second told him no less concisely that Sallie's claim to his title and inheritance had, to all intents and purposes, been recognised and admitted as valid by the Court of Chancery, expressed Messrs. Bolder & Bolder's polite regrets over the disappointment which that could not but occasion him, and served to enclose a small account of theirs against him, still outstanding. He put them both in the fire and hurried downstairs.

He was a little late in reaching the castle, but found the company still in the drawing-room; and, as Sallie came forward to greet him, a little look of belated contentment crept into her tired eyes.

" I'm glad you were able to come," was all she said in answer to his apologies, and turned to present him to the Duchess of Dawn, with whom Slyne was chatting, two very aristocratic figures, the young duchess a ravishing picture in one of Sallie's Parisian gowns, Slyne elegant as always in evening clothes.

Lord Ingoldsby, less perfectly fitted and with more than one crease in his white waistcoat, nodded indifferently to

Carthew and intercepted Sallie as she introduced the young American to him. So Carthew turned to congratulate Mr. Herries on his recovery. Captain Dove and Mr. Jobling had carefully avoided his eyes. That had been a somewhat awkward moment for all of them, and Carthew, although his own conscience was clear as regarded the other men, was glad that dinner was promptly announced.

That was the first time he had seen the banquet-hall under such conditions, and he blinked at the vista displayed as the big double doors were drawn apart.

The dinner-table in the distance was ablaze under its branching candelabra, in each of which were burning numberless wicks under silken shades. The silver girandoles above the butler's buffet beyond it were no less dazzling, while everywhere else a warm dusk deepened into almost absolute darkness wherever the glow from the still log-fires could not penetrate.

The table appointments seemed to be the most splendid the castle could boast. Carthew could catch the dull glint of gold plate on the buffet. Eight heavy, high-backed chairs of black carved oak were set about the white oasis that the table made on the dark floor. Behind each stood a silent footman, tartan-kilted, tanned of face above a spacious white shirt-front which showed off an old-fashioned doublet handsomely.

Slyne was leading the Duchess of Dawn to her seat. Lord Ingoldsby had Sallie upon his arm: and Mr. Jobling hovered close at her other shoulder. She sat down between them, with his sullen lordship on her right facing the effusive lawyer. And Carthew, following, noticed that she looked round once or twice in his own direction. Captain Dove, a queer-looking figure, had seated himself at Slyne's

side, opposite the duchess, and Herries took the chair between him and Lord Ingoldsby, leaving Carthew next the duchess.

The piper made his appearance according to the time-honoured tradition, and marched twice round the table while the oaken rafters overhead rang to the dirl of the dance he drew from his chanter. It was undoubtedly a picturesque if somewhat deafening preliminary to dinner, thought Carthew, looking on much interested at the ceremonial which should have been his prerogative instead of Sallie's. And, as the man withdrew to the inner corridor, Carthew encountered Captain Dove's furtive glance.

But it fell instantly, and the old man went on contemplatively crumbling the roll before him. He seemed to be in a somewhat somnolent mood. It occurred to Carthew that he must have been drinking a good deal before dinner.

A brisk conversation had been begun at Sallie's end of the table, where Mr. Jobling and Lord Ingoldsby were both talking to her at once. Slyne was entertaining the duchess. Carthew exchanged a casual remark or two across the table with Herries and then was drawn into a laughing discussion with the duchess, in which Slyne also took part, suave but by no means friendly toward Carthew. And so course of the stately dinner succeeded course.

More than once, Carthew wished that it were well over. There seemed to be something in the air that affected his nerves unpleasantly. His eyes were always meeting Sallie's — and it seemed to him that it was costing her also no little effort to maintain any interest in the trivialities of the table.

He felt sure that both Captain Dove and Slyne had some secret on their minds. But whether that affected her and

him he had no means of finding out. The coming of El Farish had further complicated a situation already complicated almost beyond his mental powers. He felt quite impotent to cope with it, under the added handicap of his promise to Sallie. He felt as though his promise in some sense made him a party to the unspeakably cruel deception which must have been practised on her, and that she might perhaps be justified in blaming him when she should find out — as she surely must — that her presence there was no more than part of a fraudulent masquerade. He was afraid to think how she might deal with him on that score when he should offer her, as he intended to do whenever he should find himself free to speak, himself — and his earldom, for what that was worth.

It suddenly occurred to him that he might find out something concerning El Farish from Captain Dove. All the others but Herries and he were busy. Carthew spoke to Herries across the table.

"I had a queer adventure this afternoon," he said, "at the hut on the cliffs near the head of the loch."

The old factor nodded. "That was Lord St. Just's workshop, Mr. Carthew," he mentioned.

"Well, I went up there to see how the timber had stood the storm, as you told me. And, just before turning into the woods, I took a notion to see what was over the edge — it seemed to me that a good stout railing was badly wanted there."

Herries nodded again. "That's so," he assented, lowering his voice. "It's a very dangerous spot. That was where Lord St. Just lost his life. But now — no one ever goes near the hut."

Carthew glanced at Captain Dove. But the old man's

eyes were quite unreadable behind his smoked glasses. He was listening indifferently.

" I can't imagine," Carthew went on, " what it was that suddenly made me look round, but I did. And I caught a glimpse of a most uncanny figure watching me from among the undergrowth about the trees behind. It was all in white, with a hood pulled over its head."

A lull in the conversation elsewhere left only his voice audible. The attention of the others had been attracted, and even the soft-footed servants seemed to be hanging upon his words. Sallie looked surprised, puzzled, even a little afraid. Captain Dove's features spoke a gnawing anxiety now. Slyne's close-set, unfriendly eyes were fixed intently upon him.

" That gave me a cold scare," Carthew continued, almost inclined to wish that he had not mentioned the matter at all. " I'm not quite acclimatised yet to such apparitions. So I dodged behind the hut for shelter and to get a better look at it. But it made off again, almost immediately, in the direction of the castle.

" I chased after it in a minute or two — but I was too late. It had disappeared. And I've been wondering ever since, who and what it could have been," he finished, his eyes, meeting Captain Dove's, expressing only innocent inquiry.

The footman behind him dropped a plate, and the crash that produced startled every one more than it need have. An atmosphere of strained expectancy and unrest seemed to pervade the shadowy banquet-hall. Even Lord Ingoldsby, who had been regarding Carthew with sulky ill-will, could not but notice it.

" Isn't there a tame ghost of some sort about Loqu-

hariot? " he asked Sallie, and, catching the duchess's eye, shrank into himself again under the glance she darted at him.

" Not another word about wraiths and spectres! " his youthful aunt ordered briskly. " We don't want our dinner spoiled with any such nonsense. The White Lady isn't a subject for table-talk, Ingoldsby. We've a skeleton in the cupboard at Dawn, too, you know, as every respectable Highland family has. But I fancy that what Mr. Carthew really saw to-day was simply some snow-laden bush."

" Dawn must be a very beautiful old place," Slyne remarked to the duchess, and Lord Ingoldsby turned toward Sallie again; as did Mr. Jobling after a glance of extreme disfavour at Carthew, on his other hand. And Carthew could not at all understand the general gravity, until Herries whispered over to him, under cover of the renewed conversation, " You haven't heard of our White Lady here, yet, Mr. Carthew. But she brings dule to the house, and — they say it was her that was seen in the woods this afternoon."

Carthew nodded. He had heard nothing of any such superstition, but knew enough already of the natives of those wilds to understand how they would cling to it. He thought for a moment of telling Herries that it was a man and no woman whom he had seen, but that would perhaps have disclosed too much to Captain Dove, and he decided to keep his own counsel until he could obtain some safer clue to all those mysteries.

Some movement in the little gallery above the buffet caught his attention, and he thought he could see the old housekeeper, Mrs. M'Kissock, at the balustrade with Ambrizette, Sallie's black maid, all eyes, looking down at the

gathering. And the smile Sallie flashed at him as he looked at her told him she also knew that they were there.

Slyne grew somewhat distrait and restless as the long dinner ran its course, and Carthew had to devote more attention to the duchess. Among the rest of the company all seemed to be going well. Mr. Jobling and Lord Ingoldsby were both growing always more garrulous, and even Captain Dove had brightened up under the sunny influence of the rare vintages dispensed by the butler; he had got to the length of discussing the lights on that coast with Herries, the factor, before the pop of a cork at the buffet served to announce that the champagne was coming next.

Slyne was obviously about to claim the attention of the table. Carthew supposed he must be going to propose some toast, and wondered whether he did not know any better than that. But he waited till every glass was filled before he made any move, and when Sallie would have refused the wine he sent the butler back to her with a whispered message. At which, Carthew observed, a sudden pallor overspread her face; he was watching her very closely.

The rest of the company and the servants also looked round at Slyne in surprise as he rose, but Carthew did not. He had seen Sallie lift a filmy, lace-edged handkerchief from her lap — and caught sight of something that it was meant to conceal. She raised a clenched hand above the wine-glass before her, and Carthew could have sworn that he saw some colourless drops splash down on the bubbling champagne. Then she slipped her handkerchief out of sight again, and sat with bent head, idly twirling the stem of the wine-glass between her fingers, watching the white froth break at its brim.

And still Slyne said nothing. Carthew scarcely dared to glance up at him till he saw that Sallie was gazing that way with wonder and fear in her eyes.

Slyne was standing rigid. The glass he had lifted was tilting over, its contents dripping out on the table-cloth. His mouth was open, as if to speak, and his lips were moving but emitted no sound. He was staring fixedly into an obscure corner under the musicians' gallery, where was the service-doorway from which the piper always appeared.

The others had turned their eyes in the same direction. The very servants seemed to have lost all self-control, stood stricken, gasping, helpless. And no one even breathed as a shadowy figure came slowly shambling out of the dusk into the crimson light of the fire.

It halted, irresolute, a lean, stooping, bald-headed figure, with a haggard, foolish face contorted to hold a single eye-glass in place. On its forehead was a red smudge, as of iron-rust. It was wearing a disreputable, greasy blue uniform with not a few ragged rents in it. Its boots were equally shapeless and one was burst. There was snow on them.

Captain Dove was the first among the company to recover the power of speech.

"What the devil do *you* want here, Brasse!" he cried, in a choking voice, which yet was charged with relief as if from some paralysing fear.

But before the engineer could answer a word, Herries, the old factor, had risen shakily from his seat and shuffled across the floor toward him, was peering stupidly into his face, looking him up and down with eyes that were almost blind. The duchess had got up too. Slyne had sunk into his chair again, scowling blackly, pulling at his moustache. Lord Ingoldsby and Carthew and Mr. Jobling were still

gazing blankly at the intruder. Sallie sat motionless, with one hand always at the stem of her wine-glass.

The duchess lifted the shade off one of the lights on the candelabra and looked still more searchingly at the engineer.

"Torquil St. Just!" she whispered at length, and "Lord St. Just!" cried Herries at the same moment.

The scarecrow with the eyeglass held out a slack hand to the old factor. "Hullo, Herries," he remarked, in a husky voice, "I didn't recognise you at first. You've aged a lot." And, glancing across at the duchess, "Isn't that Lady Jane Gairloch, Herries?" he asked in an audible aside. "She was only a slip of a girl, you know, old chap, when — I left home."

"She's the — Duchess — of Dawn, now, — my lord," answered Herries, the factor, helplessly. "And — you're Earl of Jura — now."

CHAPTER XXVI

A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH

WHEN the chief engineer of the *Olive Branch* at last put off from the ship for the shore in response to Captain Dove's second and still more peremptory message, he took the tiller of the boat himself, and steered straight for the water-gate of the castle. In one of his pockets he had a rusty key which presently served to turn its creaking lock.

He had left his coat in the boat and ordered the boat's crew to await his return. And he made his way with accustomed steps, almost noiselessly in his rubber-soled shoes, up the sloping underground passage which leads from the long-disused water-gate toward the gun-room which long ago was the armoury of the castle.

Once he halted to strike a match. Its feeble light showed him the rough rock walls and roof of the tunnel, the uneven slope underfoot worn almost smooth by nefarious traffic long since at an end.

He advanced again, cautiously, till he came to the brink of a broad, gaping chasm, which, but for a couple of carelessly carpentered fir-trunks stretching across it, would have closed that pathway effectually against him or anyone attempting to enter the castle by stealth, as he was doing.

He tested that makeshift bridge as well as he might be-

fore crossing it. Half-way over, a cold, damp breath from the depths beneath blew out another match he had struck as he started. A muted gurgle and squatter that came uncannily to his ears told of the subterranean tide crawling in to cleanse again the far floor of the pit below which had so often in the past served for a charnel-house. Creeping over the tree-trunks, he shrugged his shoulders as that thought passed through his mind, and drew a breath of relief as he stepped on to the solid rock on the other side.

From there, the way to the steps at the gun-room entrance was clear and the old iron gates above and below were both wide, as he discovered by sense of touch. He set an ear to the panel beyond, to find out whether the gun-room was occupied, and heard only a long-drawn groan. That seemed to come from somewhere behind him. He descended the steps again, listening intently.

Another safety-match sputtered and broke into a blue light in his tremulous fingers. He saw that the bolt on the outside of the cell door at the foot of the steps was shot and judged that there must be some one within. For a moment, he hesitated; and then he pulled the bolt free.

" Who's there? " he asked of the darkness that gave him back only another low groan for answer.

The heavy hinges of the door creaked as he thrust it open and entered. His last match showed him a huddled white heap in one corner, two hands tied behind it, a grey-haired and bleeding head. He turned back and pushed up into the gun-room without more ado. It was empty.

He looked dazedly about him in the bright lamplight, and his eyes fell on a couple of candlesticks. He picked one up and found a full box of matches beside it. From the decanter on the table before the fire he partly filled a

glass, and disappeared down the steps again with his candle to show him the way, drawing the panel back into place behind him.

Within the cell door he set down the glass he was carrying and, pulling out a pocket-knife, cut through the cord which secured the wrists of the prone figure in the corner. Its hands fell limply apart and lay palms upward. He did not at once release its ankles, but, stooping over it, pulled it round on to its back — and sprang away from it in such frantic haste that the candle jumped from its holder and left him in darkness again.

He all but brained himself as he rushed for the door, but he got outside and, stunned as he was, set his shoulder to it. It closed with a clang and, as he shot the bolt home, he sank to his knees, breathing brokenly, his forehead on its rusty iron. He righted himself with an effort, but stayed where he was, sitting huddled together against the rock wall, his face damp with cold perspiration. He was blind in the blackness about him and could hear nothing but the trip-hammer beat of his own strained heart.

Its turbulence began to die down by degrees and in time he regained some command of his stupefied faculties.

" It couldn't possibly be," he kept on assuring himself. " I must have been mistaken. It couldn't possibly — "

He pulled his slack limbs up under him, and rose, slowly, forcing them to obey him.

" But I must make sure," he muttered, and still let himself linger outside the cell door, to listen for any sound from within.

A groan, fainter than the first he had heard, encouraged him.

" Pretty far through, whoever he is," said he to himself,

and with another effort of will-power once more pulled back the bolt.

The fresh match he struck, before going further, showed him that the man inside had not moved, and he found his candle where it had fallen, in time to light it before his match burned out. With it in one hand he went forward on tiptoe, to study the other's features intently, his own expressing fear, absolute disbelief, doubt, a growing conviction in turn.

"It *is* M'Kissock!" he cried finally, and at the words unconsciously uttered, the other's eyelids began to flicker in the candle-light until at length they opened and remained open at their widest. And for a long time they two stayed thus, regarding each other as if bereft of power of movement or speech.

Then Farish M'Kissock's slack jaws took to twitching convulsively. A low moaning broke from his mouth. A film came over his dreadfully staring eyes. He would have fallen unconscious again had not the engineer snatched up the glass at one side and poured down his throat a few drops of the spirit it held. His teeth closed with a snap and he groaned again, heartrendingly; but, in a little, he had so far benefited by that hurtful remedy as to recover the use of his voice. His lips moved and his rescuer leaned forward to catch the hoarse, agonised whisper that came from them.

"You were always — a cruel devil, Lord St. Just," gasped Farish M'Kissock, "even when you were alive. It should be my right — to torment *you* now, and not — you me!"

The engineer drew back a little. He knew then that he had not been mistaken.

"You're not dead yet, M'Kissock," said he soothingly,

in his voice of a gentleman, "although — I'll be damned if I can understand how that is!" And then, suddenly realising a little of all it must mean to him that his old enemy was still living, "If I had only known —" he murmured with exceeding bitterness. "Oh, my God! Think of all those awful years!"

Farish M'Kissock attempted to laugh, with a very horrid effect. He raised a trembling hand to his head, and looked at its fingers, all smeared with red. His rolling eyes tried to pierce the obscurity of the vault in which he was lying. Remembrance of the more immediate past began to stir in his mind. He drew a long, deep, painful breath.

"I thought — I thought —" he mumbled brokenly, and his eyes closed. He was once more insensible.

The engineer of the *Olive Branch* looked round for the candlestick he had dropped, and, finding that, made his light safe. Then he kneeled down beside the other and raised his head and lifted him so that his shoulders should rest on the rock behind. Another teaspoonful of the stimulant in the glass flogged his patient's flagging heart into further effort, and Farish M'Kissock opened his eyes again.

"Loose my feet," he begged brokenly, and the engineer did so: but he lay still where he was, too weak to move. For a time, the only sound to be heard was his hurtful, irregular breathing. Then he glanced curiously, for the first time, at his rescuer's threadbare blue uniform.

"You're just in time, Lord St. Just," said he, his voice clearer and his ideas beginning to gain some coherent shape. "Though that's not the name I should be calling you now, since you're still living in spite of me, and Earl of Jura by all the laws of the land.

"But — where have you come from so late-along?

Where have you been since — They hold it against me here to this day that I murdered your lordship; and — there was your body found later on at the foot of the cliffs in front of your hut."

The other sat down by the doorway, with a limp shrug of the shoulders that spoke a weariness beyond words.

" I didn't fall very far, M'Kissock," he answered presently. " And — I thought you must have slipped over too as we fought there — for I saw a body sunk among the rocks in the water below; it was a still day, you remember. But — where were you? "

" I took to my heels through the woods, thinking it would go ill with me when what I believed had happened to you came out; for it was known that I had gone to your hut to seek you, and why." His voice grew very hard, and he shot a glance of unquenchable hatred at his companion. " So I lay hid in the hills till nightfall, and then fled the countryside. I heard afterwards that they had found your body, although it was scarcely more than a rickle of bare bones by then, and of course they put the blame of it all on me without more ado."

The engineer of the *Olive Branch* who was also the Earl of Jura sighed drearily. The best years of his life had gone to pay the penalty fate had exacted, through that mistake, for a fault he had almost forgotten. And now, desire had failed him; his spirit was utterly broken.

" I was just such another fool as yourself, M'Kissock! " said he in a hopeless tone. " I was afraid they would lay your death at my door, and — I bolted too; without a word to a living soul. I've been afraid ever since, because — I've been told that the police were always looking for me."

M'Kissock's jaw dropped. He looked again at the other's torn uniform.

"Who was it told you that?" he asked, almost in a whisper.

"The Old Man on the *Olive Branch*. I've been chief engineer on his ship for five or six years, and before that — I shipped as a stoker at first, M'Kissock, at Yedo, in Japan. I was starving there. And I've worked for him all that time like a slave — on the strength of a groundless lie!"

"Had he any idea who you were?" the other demanded.

"I thought he must know; but I can see now that he was simply making a fool of me for his own ends. If he had known, he surely wouldn't have sent for me to come ashore here."

"He certainly would not," agreed his companion with grim assurance, and they both fell silent again, each engrossed in his own overwhelming, embittered reflections.

"Dove knows nothing at all about you," said Farish M'Kissock presently, and Lord Jura looked up as if astonished at the sound of his voice.

"But — how do you know that, M'Kissock?" the latter inquired in a querulous tone, pulling nervously at his underlip. "What are you doing here, in that queer rig-out? I don't understand. Where have you — "

"I've been just such another fool as yourself, my lord," said Farish M'Kissock, his voice vibrant with impotent, irrepressible anger. "It's worse than damnable to think — You'll scarcely believe that I've served under Dove in my time, but it's true enough. I was second mate on the *Fer de Lance*, long ago, when he called himself Captain Brown. And — I owe him a score as heavy as yours, ay, and heavier;

a score I came here to pay. But I was too hasty, and — he got the better of me at the start; I was no match for the two of them — he had the man Slyne on his side." His breath almost failed him and he fell to coughing convulsively.

"And — what has brought them to Loquhariot?" the other asked in utter amazement as soon as he could make himself heard. But Farish M'Kissock sat wheezing and gasping for some little time before answering that.

"They have come with one whom they call the Lady Josceline Justice," said he at length, glancing askance at his companion. "Slyne's minded to marry her now — and so lay hands on all that is yours."

The Earl of Jura gazed blankly at his burst boots. His mind was all in a muddle. The stokehold of the *Olive Branch*, and then its engine-room, seemed to have sapped whatever intelligence he might once have possessed. His belated release from slavery had left him with his wits benumbed and torpid.

"But, of course, they don't know that I —" he began, his face brightening, and then broke off. "Where did they get hold of her, M'Kissock?"

"Dove's had her on board his ship for years," said Farish M'Kissock brusquely.

"Is it Sallie you're talking about!" he exclaimed. "Good God! Can it be possible that — But never mind now. I must —" He made as if to rise.

"Wait a minute, my lord," requested Farish M'Kissock in a tone which compelled his attention. "You've got two desperate men to deal with above-stairs. You've seen how they've handled me, and they would think nothing of throwing the two of us, neck and crop, into the drowning-hole in

the tunnel behind you. You will be very ill-advised to beard them alone. I can help you — "

" How? "

" You'll see when the time comes."

" But I can't stay squatting here like a rat in a drain while they — I'm a free man — now that I know you're alive after all," declared the ragged scarecrow with the eyeglass, as if to encourage himself. " And I'm Earl of Jura; there's no getting out of that. I must put a stop to Slyne's villainous scheme at once, M'Kissock. He's a rotten bad egg; *I* know him. It would never do to let him get — her into his infernal clutches."

Farish M'Kissock eyed him with no good will.

" Ay," he agreed reluctantly. " Your lordship's a belted earl now, by all the laws of the land. And Farish M'Kissock that was a king is fated to die a beggar.

" But, first, — and it's hard, dooms hard! — I must help you — so far at least. It's the two of us against those other two, for the moment. Afterwards, we will talk of — yon old matter between us; for, mind you! Lord Jura, I neither forget nor forgive."

The Earl of Jura shrugged his shoulders again. He had almost forgotten the cause of his old quarrel on the cliffs with the gamekeeper's son. He had more than enough to think about in its seemingly endless outcome. And his apparent indifference seemed to inflame the hatred the other still bore him.

" I will help you — but only because I *must*," said Farish M'Kissock harshly. " And you must help me to help you — to your own hurt."

He leaned forward, panting, as if enraged over his own weakness of body. The engineer rose, regarding him as if

not very sure of his sanity, and, having picked up the candle, assisted him to his feet. He stood for a moment supporting himself by the wall, his knees giving and recovering under him, and then the giddiness passed. He took a tentative step or two and presently was able to follow his rescuer from the cell.

"Is there anyone in the gun-room?" he asked in an anxious whisper at the foot of the steps. Lord Jura listened closely for a moment or two at the panel above, drew it open a little, and looking down again, shook his head. He pulled the panel wide and then held out a hand to his follower; who took it very reluctantly and, with its aid, reached the room above, step by slow, uncertain step.

"Sit down and rest for a minute or two," suggested the engineer.

"Not here," he demurred. "It wouldn't be safe — too near the tunnel. We must have help at hand when we meet them. What time is it? They'll be at dinner now. Take me along the servants' passage and by the terrace to the Pipers' Port: we should meet no one that way."

But the other, a hand at his tremulous lips, was looking with mazed eyes about the remembered room that he had so often seen in his dreams during the age-long time of torment he had endured. His rods lay ready for use in the long rack where he had left them. A pair of guns his father had given him stood in their usual place at one end of the full stand adorning one wall. The head of his first stag still hung above the mantel, and the big wild-cat he had killed in the wood behind his hut on the cliffs glared at him out of its glass eyes from over the door leading to the pantry. That corner at least of the castle was quite unchanged.

He caught sight of his own reflection in the plate-glass

casing which covered another full stand of guns, and turned away from it with a grimace of distaste. He had certainly changed, and very much for the worse, himself, since he had last seen Loquhariot. He glanced at Farish M'Kissock, the gamekeeper's son with whom he had fought, as he almost blushed to remember, about a girl, and was still more shocked to see the skeleton-like, decrepit-looking old man regarding him with hot, inimical eyes from under shaggy down-drawn white eyebrows above which hung long matted locks of grey hair darkly discoloured with drying blood; for they two had been headstrong lads together, friends in some sort, companions at least in many a scapegrace prank.

"Ay," said Farish M'Kissock unpleasantly, as though reading the thought that ran through his mind. "I'm far worse-looking than you are, my lord. And something of that I am owing your lordship. But never mind now; we have other matters before us first, and it will be well to attend to them before it may be too late."

The engineer started at that. His head was not very clear and he had for the moment almost forgotten —

"Come on, then, M'Kissock," said he, and blew out the candle he was still unconsciously carrying and led the way through the little pantry behind.

The two of them emerged from that into a dimly lighted passage along which they proceeded without a sound as far as another door which opened outward on to the lower battlements at the seaward front of the castle.

"Let me through first," requested Farish M'Kissock, after his companion had made sure that there was no one beyond it, "and mind that the wind doesn't drive it shut with a clash." He was firmer upon his feet now and seemed to have gained some measure of strength from the stimulus

of his stubborn purpose. Bare-foot as he was, he took no notice of the driving snow on the terrace outside, although his companion shivered as they turned along the wall in the teeth of the blast that was blowing.

" Get inside, for God's sake! " Lord Jura begged of the ghostly figure in front of him as it stooped to set an ear to the keyhole in the portico at the other end of the terrace, and his teeth were chattering when he entered the dark, empty closet behind it.

He had to set his shoulder to it to shut it against the storm. As soon as he had accomplished that, he shook the snow from his ragged coat and struck a match and glanced stupidly about him.

" Put that out," ordered Farish M'Kissock in a suppressed, angry whisper. " They'll maybe see some glimmer — they're all inside."

The other obeyed him meekly, and for a space the two of them stood there in the darkness, on the alert, drawing quick, restricted breaths. They could hear the echo of voices from the banquet-hall. These gradually died away, all but one which seemed to be telling some story. A distant crash, as of a dish dropped on the floor, alarmed the two listeners, but after that the conversation and laughter within went on again. The engineer crossed the closet noiselessly on his rubber soles, and, " What next, M'Kissock? " he whispered, as if content to resign himself to the guidance of the more masterful will.

" You will go in to them," the other instructed him. " Hear what you can before you declare yourself, and — you must judge for yourself what to say and do. I'll wait behind for a bit — Dove and Slyne believe that I'm safely out of the way — but, as soon as it's needful, I'll face them

too. Till then, never mention my name nor any word of what I have told you.

"Pluck up some heart!" he hissed savagely. "This is the Castle of Loquhariot — and you're the Earl of Jura. But they'll out-match you yet unless you stand your ground against them."

The engineer humbly attempted to square his shoulders, and, fumbling, found the latch of the door. He opened it very quietly, enough and no more to see through into the banquet-hall: and stood there for a time studying the scene at the table. Farish M'Kissock, at his elbow, was staring out at it too, with fierce, eager eyes. He pulled the door slowly back, and Lord Jura passed through, unnoticed among the shadows in that obscure corner.

A cork popped explosively, and the butler came forward from the buffet with a big, golden-necked bottle. The engineer paused. He had recognised Captain Dove in the distance and notwithstanding the old man's unusual garb and black glasses.

He caught sight of Sallie, bewilderingly beautiful in a costume such as he had not set eyes upon since — he had last dined there himself. He squared his stooping shoulders again, and saw Slyne rise from his seat, the wine-glass the butler had just filled for him in one hand.

The talk and laughter gradually subsided and silence ensued. Lord Jura took a tentative step toward the table, and stopped again as Slyne's careless, smiling glance suddenly met his and changed to a rigid scowl. Then Captain Dove looked round, and, after a breathless interval, "What the devil do *you* want here, Brasse!" he cried explosively.

At the sound of that harsh, hated voice, all the uncertain presence of mind the intruder could boast deserted him,

He stood as if rooted there, a shrinking, irresolute figure, until the old factor came shuffling across the floor toward him and some one else lifted the shade off one of the lights on the candelabra so that it shone full on his drawn, haggard face.

CHAPTER XXVII

DEBIT AND CREDIT

"AND you're — Earl of Jura — now," stammered Herries, helplessly, as though that undeniable fact altogether staggered belief.

The ragged scarecrow with the eyeglass nodded, somewhat shamefacedly, and once more made a pitiful effort to straighten his stooping shoulders. Herries looked away, wretchedly, and then, as if understanding something of what must be in his mind, took it upon himself to dismiss the servants, but bidding them remain within call and also to see to it that no word went elsewhere of what they had seen and heard in the banquet-hall.

The rest of the company were regarding the ex-engineer of the *Olive Branch* with very varied expressions. A sickly pallor had overspread Slyne's rigid features as he heard the title by which Herries had addressed that untimeous intruder. Captain Dove, his hands still on the table before him, and crouching as if to spring, was breathing jerkily from between set teeth, like one with a seizure. The Marquis of Ingoldsby's narrow forehead was corrugated by a fixed and splenetic frown which kept his eyes and mouth at their very widest. Behind Sallie's questioning, compassionate, clouded glance lurked hope, and fear, and a steadfast determination; she was still holding fast the stem of her wineglass. Justin Carthew looked as if he did not know in the

least who or where he was. Mr. Jobling's purple visage and pendulous jowl spoke plainly the apoplectic and painful nature of his emotions. Of them all, only the Duchess of Dawn seemed to have preserved any measure of self-possession.

While Herries was giving the butler his orders, she crossed toward the fireplace with a little characteristic, impulsive gesture.

"I hope you haven't forgotten me, Torquil?" said she, almost timidly. It could not but hurt her to see what the years had made of the man who, when she had met him last, had been little more than a teasing, mischievous school-boy.

"I knew you at once," he replied, and blinked back at her and cleared his throat uncomfortably. The pinch of his present decayed estate before her once more quickened his numb sense of the grievous injury done him by Captain Dove. He glanced again in Captain Dove's direction, but the old man's gaze met his absolutely mystified; and his heavy heart began to grow hot again as he recalled how often his cunning taskmaster had cowed him by dint of threats to disclose his unknown identity to the police.

"We all believed you were dead," said the duchess, and he answered her stupidly, at random. His sullen eyes had encountered Slyne's, in which he read aright dismay unspeakable and a stunned seeking after some elusive scheme to turn the tables upon him yet. She saw how distrait he was. "But you'll tell me by and by something of your adventures," said she. "I just wanted to say how glad I am — that you're safe and sound after all. And now I'll be off to the drawing-room with Ingoldsby. We're only in the way here. I know you must have a great deal to say to your sister."

He started at hearing Sallie so styled. His restless regard had reached her, at the end of the table next him, and he wondered what it could be that had brought such an uncontrollable gleam of relief into her still bewildered eyes.

"I wish you would wait for a little, if you don't mind," he answered the duchess. "I'd like you to stay beside her until — I get rid of some of those others, if you don't mind."

She nodded, if rather reluctantly, and turned aside toward Herries as Sallie approached, holding out to the shabby prodigal whose belated return had brought about such a stupefying change in the situation there a tremulous, eager hand.

"You're just in time," Sallie said to him in such a glad, warm, grateful voice that even he, who knew very well her generous nature, was almost surprised by her evident pleasure in thus admitting his prior right to the high rank and vast heritage which he believed should have been hers but for him. He was infinitely embarrassed when, before them all, she stooped and touched with her lips the back of the claw-like, toil-stained hand, he had tried hard to withhold from her.

And she, having sealed her abdication in such wise, looked up into his flushed face with a swift, shy smile, the flutter of the fledgling hope in her heart stirring softly the priceless lace that outlined her bosom, and the little golden locket that lay therein.

"You're my brother — my step-brother, now, aren't you, Mr. Brasse?" she asked, almost in a whisper.

"It seems so, Sallie," he answered mechanically, his wandering wits almost beyond his control. Her unconscious use of the name by which she had always known him

She touched with her lips the back of the toil-stained hand.

had brought to his mental vision a blurred picture of her on the bridge of the *Olive Branch* in a stiff breeze, himself at the fiddley-hatch.

"And everything that might have been mine is yours now?"

"Ours," he corrected, without any interest, as if that was of no consequence. "There should be enough for us both; and, in any case, I need very little — now."

"But it's all yours by law, isn't it?" she urged. "I must make sure, because —" She looked back, over her shoulder. Mr. Jobling had joined Slyne and Captain Dove; the three of them were engaged, with bated breaths, in a sibilant argument, their heads very close together. Lord Ingoldsby had just risen and was slouching over to the other ingle-nook, where the duchess had made Herries sit down. Only Justin Carthew remained motionless, half turned in his high-backed chair, leaning heavily on one of its arms while he still stared, almost unseeingly, at Sallie and her companion.

"How does that fellow come to be here?" asked the ex-engineer, indicating Carthew with a puzzled nod, and, as Sallie told him what had occurred since she herself had arrived at Loquhariot, his expression grew always more blank again. But when she went on to explain how Slyne had tried to entrap her for his own profit, his dull eyes brightened and began to burn.

"And now," she said at last, "perhaps he won't want to marry me — when there's nothing to be gained by it. I can't tell you how thankful I am that you've come home in time."

Carthew got up from the table then and came limping forward to greet the man whose belated home-coming had

made such a difference to him. And Mr. Jobling, evidently fired by his example, followed, to beg an introduction from her ladyship to his lordship.

"I've been acting for Lady Josceline, my lord," he explained very volubly, having thus secured his lordship's by no means favourable attention, "just as I would have been most happy to act for your lordship if I had known — " He came to a sudden stop, except for a stifled, explosive hiccough, as Captain Dove shouldered him aside and confronted the ex-engineer of the *Olive Branch* with his most sleek, benevolent expression.

Slyne was close behind Captain Dove. The pallor had passed from his face. Mr. Jobling apparently did not deem it politic to push in again just then. He choked down his not unnatural indignation and stayed hovering about, very ill at ease, in the background. The others, all but Sallie, had also moved a little away.

But it did not seem to be Captain's Dove's idea to exchange any quiet confidences with his late chief-engineer. What he had to say was for all ears. Without witnesses he would, no doubt, have conducted himself very differently. Handicapped as he was by their company, he had no recourse but to enlist their sympathies on his side.

"Well, if this doesn't beat all for luck!" said he in a tone of the extremest gratification, his visible features wreathed in an unctuous smile. "I don't suppose you're sorry *now* that you came ashore when I sent for you, eh! You must admit that I've managed a very pleasant little surprise for you — "

"You've managed nothing — except to put your own neck into a noose at last," retorted Lord Jura. He was standing very erect although he could not control the nerv-

ous tremor at the back of his neck. He saw no need now to mince matters with the old man, whose callous effrontery was stirring his sluggish pulses to such a pitch that he could scarcely resist the dire temptation to spring at his throat and choke the evil life out of him there and then. But a light hand laid on his arm diverted him for a moment from any such insane idea, and his unreasoning rage died down a little as he looked round into Sallie's appealing eyes.

" How long will it take to get the police here, Herries? " he asked abruptly over one shoulder. And, at that, the arras in the dark corner beside the Pipers' Port swayed slightly, as though there were some one behind it about to come forth.

" The telegraph-wire is down, my lord," the old factor answered doubtfully, " and — it would maybe be wasting a life to send anyone to attempt the Pass with a message in weather like this. But — till we can safely get word to the police, there are lots of stout lads in Loquhariot that will do your lordship's bidding."

" And more on board the *Olive Branch* that will do mine," Captain Dove interrupted, with a smooth assurance which could not but add to the listeners' perturbation. " Da Costa has his orders, too. It will be a bad look out for Loquhariot if ever he and his lambs have to come ashore here to look for me. You've seen them crack far harder nuts than this ramshackle old castle of yours! You know very well —

" But what's the use of arguing about it? You owe me far too much to talk in that style. If you could fetch the police here at this moment, you couldn't afford to face them. You've surely forgotten — "

"I have forgotten nothing," Lord Jura assured him, in a steady, ominous voice.

"That's just as well," declared Captain Dove, who seemed determined to stand his ground, "because it will save me reminding you, before your fashionable friends, how much I've done for you, first and last, since I picked you up derelict on the beach at Yedo. You'd have been very badly off without me then, eh! And, but for me, you'd maybe have come to a worse end than starving, since. I've brought you back to your own, when all's said and done. It doesn't say much for you, Lord Jura, that you'd turn round on *me* now!"

He spoke pathetically, as one disappointed in the return made him for favours lavished with a free hand. And such of the others as did not know the real facts of the matter looked somewhat doubtfully at Lord Jura. Captain Dove was obviously pleased with the impression he had produced.

"Everything you have done has been done entirely to serve your own ends," the ex-engineer answered him in few words. "I owe you no favour — not the very slightest. You owe me God knows how many years of my life that you've tricked me out of. And, what's more — "

"And what's more," Captain Dove interrupted, "you think you owe me only a grudge. You've no more use for me now that I've served your turn. I've asked nothing of you, you'll notice. It's only because you've thought fit to threaten me that I've reminded you — "

"There was no need," Lord Jura asserted. "I have forgotten nothing. You can tell your side of the story to the judge at the next assizes — and I'll tell mine."

Mr. Jobling's puffy face blanched at that, but Captain Dove did not even change countenance.

"So much for yourself," said he patiently. "You think you can best whiten your own record by trying to blacken mine. I'll say no more about that — except that it isn't always true that dead men tell no tales. And you'll have to tell the judge at the next assizes the real reason why you ran away from home."

He was watching the other's face narrowly, to see what effect that stray shot might have, and was clearly encouraged at seeing Lord Jura wince.

"But there's another point to be settled," he went on with slow insistence, "before we go any further. I've brought you back to your own, as I said, and, more than that, I've brought you back — your sister. I wouldn't have made any song-an'-dance about such a small matter either, but — since it's to be debit and credit between us, I'd like to know how you think that affects the account.

"You say you've forgotten nothing. Have you remembered that I've brought her up, so to speak, since she was knee-high to me? Have you ever thought where she'd be to-day if I hadn't — But, of course, you don't know where I came across *her*. And I'm not going to tell you just now. All I *will* say is that it rests absolutely in my hands whether — whether she stays safe here with you or — You may believe me or not, as you like, but — Better talk it over with her before you go any further, — my lord!"

He frowned, as if warningly, at Sallie, and turned on his heel and, swaggering back to the table, grotesquely aggressive, sat down again with his back to them all, leaving them to make whatever they liked of his veiled threat and half-spoken hints as to his mysterious power over her. Slyne

followed him. But Mr. Jobling pushed forward again, eager to establish himself on a safer footing of service to the other side.

" If your lordship will allow me," said he, his head on one side, shoulders bent and hands clasped, " I think I can undertake to arrange matters for you with Captain Dove. Some small money payment, perhaps, would save further unpleasantness — for her ladyship as well. We can scarcely contest his claim for at least the amount of — "

" I don't know what you're talking about — or what business it is of yours! " said Lord Jura sharply and turned to give Herries some order. But, before he could speak, Sallie claimed his attention again.

" Let them go," she implored of him vehemently. " Oh, please let them go. Don't send for the police. I couldn't bear to think that they had come to any harm through helping me — even for their own purposes. And some of what Captain Dove says is true enough: he's looked after me for longer than I can remember, almost — and but for him I wouldn't be here now. The past has sometimes been very hard for us both. It would spoil the future entirely for me if I felt that I had been the means of betraying him to the police. If they'll only promise to leave us alone now, won't you let them go? — for my sake."

Lord Jura pulled at his under-lip in helpless indecision. He knew that he could not for long deny the girl anything she asked of him thus.

" You don't understand, Sallie," he said at length, very vexedly. " You'd better go off to your own room now, — and take Lady Jane — the duchess — with you. Leave me to deal with the Old Man and Slyne; it isn't only on my own account — "

" Will you set them on board the *Olive Branch* safe, if they promise to leave us alone now? " she urged, not to be denied in her purpose.

" But, — what are they to you? " he demanded. " Surely — it can't be — You don't — care for Jasper Slyne, do you, Sallie? I'll let *him* go, if you like — though he doesn't deserve it."

She shuddered. " If you hadn't come to-night," she told him tremulously, " you wouldn't have found me here — alive. I had made up my mind — " Her voice died away, but he understood.

" But I can't treat them as they would me," she reminded him, her anxious eyes holding his till he looked away, with an effort of will. " I could never be happy here, or anywhere else, if I left any of my old shipmates in the power of the law. Chance has brought us both here — and in time. Will you not wipe the past out of your mind entirely, as I have done, and — You won't refuse me the first favour I have asked of you, here in your home? And I won't ever forget how good you have always been to me."

He looked into her eyes again, and was lost. " Have it your own way, then," he said, as if with a grudge. " But — " His face fell. He looked furtively behind him. He had just remembered his pact with Farish M'Kissock. " You must get rid of them both at once, and very quietly," he whispered. " I won't answer for what may happen yet unless — "

Sallie did not even wait to thank him for his weak-willed complaisance. She crossed swiftly to the table where Jasper Slyne and Mr. Jobling were once more in low-voiced conclave with Captain Dove.

The three conspirators, sitting with heads together, in

angry, undertoned argument, glanced up as she approached them. Their lowering faces lightened a little at sight of her, but fell again into black, rebellious masks while they listened sullenly to what she had to say. As she finished, Captain Dove brought a heavy fist down upon the table like a sledge-hammer, and, while the glasses still rang to its impact on the solid oak, " I'll be damned if I budge from here by one step," he cried at the top of his voice, and sprang from his chair, " till it suits me." He pulled his smoked glasses from off his nose, flung them on the floor, and trod viciously upon them as he advanced on Lord Jura again, ignoring all his companions' attempts to restrain him.

" Now, see here, my friend! " said he with another fierce imprecation, and thrust his face up close to the ex-engineer's while Carthew stepped hastily forward beside Lord Jura. " Now, see here, my friend! I've had about enough of you and your nonsense. Say whatever you've got to say to me now yourself and be done with it. Then I'll tell *you* what you're going to do — for me and my adopted daughter. There's no need for any more humming and hawing about it. Speak up! "

But his former slave did not shrink from before his withering glance. The banquet-hall of Loquhariot was not the bridge of the *Olive Branch:* and Lord Jura was even glad that his one-time tyrant did not seem disposed to avail himself of that last chance of escape at which Sallie had beguiled him into conniving.

" For my sister's sake," he said quietly, and not without dignity, " I was willing to — "

" You'll do whatever I tell you — for your own sake as well as your sister's," broke in Captain Dove, and looked

him up and down with a virtuous frown. " Why, but for me, you'd have no sister! " He lowered his voice to a threatening whisper. " And you'd have hung long ago yourself, for the murder that you did here! " he hissed.

Lord Jura regarded him gravely for a moment or two, in silence; and then, turning toward the Pipers' Port, " Are you there, M'Kissock? " he called, in the tone of one entitled to prompt attention.

CHAPTER XXVIII

ISHMAEL'S HERITAGE

THERE was something very dreadful about Farish M'Kissock's appearance as he came shuffling forward from the corner under the gallery. His torn and travel-stained white robe gave him a ghostly aspect which was heightened by the cold and clammy pallor of his face, his sunken eyes, the matted, blood-stained tangle of grey hair that merged into a long, unkempt beard and moustache. He moved like an automaton, with all his limbs and joints loose. The stamp of death was on him.

The Duchess of Dawn shrank into the ingle behind her as he approached, and her noble nephew backed after her, one elbow uplifted, fists clenched, with the apparent idea of protecting her from that spectre-like apparition; at whom Herries also was gazing, aghast but motionless, while Mr. Jobling, with bulging eyes and open mouth, felt about him as if for some friendly hand to clutch at and, finding none, laid hold of Slyne by the coat — who struck his fingers away with a muttered oath. Slyne and Captain Dove and Justin Carthew were all regarding him with blank dismay. Sallie uttered a little, low, pitiful cry as she recognised in the worn-out wreck who had halted mutely a few paces away the man she had seen only a month or two before in the prime of life and the plenitude of his power, the Emir El Farish.

His burning eyes met and held Captain Dove's cowed, murderous, questing glance for a moment; and then he laughed, in a most grisly manner.

" I'm dying now, Captain Dove," said he, in a strong, deep voice that contrasted strangely with his obvious bodily exhaustion, " a day or two sooner than need have been — but for you. *You're* hale and strong yet. You'll fight hard — when the hangman and his mates come quietly into your cell at daybreak to pinion you. And, when you're standing on the trap, with your head in a bag and the knot in a new rope rasping under one ear, you'll think of me that's waiting for you in the pit below the scaffold.

" But that's for by and by; and there's to-day to be done with first." He laughed again, in such a fashion that the listeners shuddered. " I told you there was nothing at all that would avail you against me," said he. " Maybe you'll believe me now! "

Captain Dove looked furtively round at the others' faces, and spoke, with obvious difficulty. " I've no idea what you're talking about — "

" I found M'Kissock — where you left him," interrupted Lord Jura, as if to say that it was needless now to deny anything.

" You'd better send him back there, then," Captain Dove retorted rancorously. " The man's mad — and dangerous. That's why I had him shut up. He thinks he has some grudge against you, too. Take care he doesn't — "

" I'm not mad. I'm not even dangerous enough to save the hangman his job with you," said Farish M'Kissock quietly, and turned to Lord Jura again. " But *you'll* see to it, my lord, that the cruel wrongs this old Judas has wrought you and me — ay, and even the innocent girl be-

side you there — are avenged to the uttermost. I can trust you for that at least."

Lord Jura looked forlornly at Sallie. He could not now recall his promise to her if Captain Dove still chose to take advantage of that.

"Sal— My sister has begged me to let him go free, M'Kissock," he said at length, almost apologetically, "and — I've agreed."

Farish M'Kissock's head had begun to shake as if with palsy. He tried to speak, but could not articulate. The veins about his clammy, yellow temples were swelling darkly out, like cords. Carthew limped across to the table and brought him over a glass of water. He swallowed some with difficulty, and, finding his voice again, "You fool!" he cried, with inexpressible bitterness. "Oh, you blind fool! Will you let him serve you as he served me with her to help him!"

Lord Jura's face flushed.

"I want to hear no more from you in that strain," he said haughtily, as if the old spirit of place and power were stirring within him again. "It is sufficient that my sister's wishes — "

"If Sallie *were* your sister, it would make no difference," the dying man declared with fierce impatience. "This is no time to humour whim of hers. In any case — she is no kin of yours, Lord Jura, as Captain Dove well knows. He could have told you — *Keep him off!* He'll make an end of me before my time if he can, to silence me. And you must hear, before I go, — " He staggered backward, coughing, and almost choked for want of breath. Captain Dove had made a wild lunge at him, but Justin Carthew had sprung forward in time to save him from the old man's

frenzied attempt: and Herries and Lord Ingoldsby also stepped in between him and his would-be murderer.

"All right, then," panted Captain Dove. "Leave me alone, and I'll do him no harm. I quite forgot that he was off his head, his lies provoke me so."

Lord Jura had put Sallie behind him to shield her in the struggle that promised. He looked round at her then with dazed, doubtful eyes and read in hers pain and horror and disbelief equally dreadful. He drew a deep, sobbing breath and confronted Farish M'Kissock again.

"What in God's name are you driving at!" he demanded, in a tone which told the stress of mind he was suffering. And Farish M'Kissock regarded him very evilly for a little before replying. Slyne and Captain Dove and Carthew were waiting, as if on barbed tenter-hooks. The others, and Sallie also, seemed to be stricken speechless and still.

"I am here to seek my revenge, my lord, as you know," said Farish M'Kissock slowly at length, and licked his bloodless lips. "There is still a small matter betwixt your lordship and me that remains to be settled — an old wrong done, which your lordship has almost forgotten, it seems. *I* neither forget nor forgive.

"I may not have time left to tell all I owe Captain Dove there — for that goes back through long years to what I owe you. But, before I am done with, I think I can settle with you as well as with him.

"Sallie is no sister of yours, as Captain Dove knows — though she herself has been beguiled as easily as your lordship. Your lordship's sister, the Lady Josceline Justice, died in my arms eight or nine weeks ago: and she was my wife. Sallie there, knowing nothing, saw her a few hours before —"

He blinked and hung his head for a moment, as if recalling all that had come to pass since he had laid the light, wasted body aside on the sand, and set a guard over it until — until he could spare time to see to a decent grave.

" She was my wife," he said again, looking up at the last of the haughty Juras with hate unquenchable in his glance. " And that's the revenge I have taken on you and yours, my lord, for the ill your lordship lightly wrought — the other, that should have been."

A woman's voice came wailingly from the musicians' gallery and Mr. Jobling uttered a low moan of abject fear. His nerves had evidently failed him altogether. Hasty steps were descending the short stone stairway which led to the gallery, and then Janet M'Kissock came tottering forth across the floor from the foot of it.

" Oh, Farish! " the old woman cried to her brother. " Have you no heart at all! Are there not enough lives ruined already that you would wreck her ladyship's here as well ? " And she turned toward Sallie with a poor, pitiful gesture as of protection. " It *cannot* be as you say," she whimpered. " For how could *I* be mistaken, that knew her father far better than you — ay, and the countess her mother too; whose locket she was wearing at her neck the day she first came to Loquhariot. I'll swear to it, at any rate! I had it for a time in my own keeping, before the countess — went away.

" Ask her ladyship where she got the locket, your grace. And then my poor, distracted brother will maybe admit that he's been deceived about her."

The duchess's anxious, encouraging look seemed to beg an answer of Sallie. But the girl was gazing, with dumb dismay in her wide, wounded eyes, at Farish M'Kissock,

recalling as well as she could amid such a maze the incidents of the hours she had spent in his camp on the African coast.

Under the spell of his piercing glance the shadowy banquet-hall of Loquhariot seemed to fade away from her, and in its place she saw again the spacious rose-pink pavilion behind the carved chair on which he was seated in state among his staring councillors, under a great green flag with a golden harp on its heavy folds. Behind her, from about the picket-lines where she had noticed the negro slaves at their work, she seemed to hear the whinnying of the horses, the vicious squeals of the restless camels. In the dim crimson glow of the dying fires she was gazing again at the horsehair tents in the background, and the multitude of men and women and children all busy about them in the open air.

She saw, as if in a vision, the Emir spring from his seat and come hastily forward to where she stood shrinkingly at Captain Dove's shoulder. He was tall and stalwart on foot, a fine figure of a man even in his loose, shapeless garments, with a bronzed, hook-nosed, handsome face of his own, a heavy moustache, the brooding, patient, predatory eyes of a desert vulture. And, as he confronted Captain Dove, over whom he seemed to tower threateningly, the hood of his *selham* slipped back, disclosing a flaming shock of red hair.

Her own veil had slipped to her chin, but she had been unconscious of that until his blazing eyes had shifted from Captain Dove's unconcerned face to hers. She pulled it hurriedly back into place, and he, turning to the curious onlookers, rid himself of their company before he called, in a caressing voice, on some one within the big, white tent that was the heart of his stronghold. And there came forth a woman, veiled as she herself had been, but clad in silk

instead of cotton, who bowed submissively to what he had to say, and then held out a slender, bloodless, burning hand to her. . . .

It all came back to her memory, as if in a lightning-flash that left her stunned and helpless to face the appalling present again. She knew now who the Emir's wife had been — a girl of her own age, but grown old before her time and weary of the little life that had been left in her then. She knew that Farish M'Kissock was speaking the truth now, and that she must bear witness to it at whatever cost to herself. It made no difference that Captain Dove's expression was a mute and none the less dreadful threat of what she might look for at his hands if she dared to do so. The helpless horror of the position in which his cunning intrigue had left her broke on her mind like a thunderbolt. She covered her shamed, white face with both hands, and turned, swaying on her feet, and would have fallen had not the duchess thrown both arms about her and held her there in a close, warm clasp, while Justin Carthew and Lord Ingoldsby, who had both darted forward to help her, glared at each other vindictively.

"It *can't* be true!" said the duchess, half to herself, but Sallie heard, and stood upright again, dizzily, letting her hands fall, prepared to do public penance for her innocent and unwitting part in the shameless fraud that had been perpetrated. She did not give a thought to the fact that all her own fair dreams of the future were finally shattered and past repair. But she wondered what the poor folk she had befriended about the village would have to say when they heard that she was no better than a common impostor, and the duchess, who had befriended her, and Justin Carthew, whom Mr. Jobling had treated as a trespasser there!

"It *is* true," she asserted, desperately, in a tone which might have touched even Captain Dove, "though I didn't know till now — " She almost broke down under the dire humiliation she was enduring, but the duchess would not let her go when she would have drawn away from the arm at her waist, and she forced herself to go on with her unspeakably hurtful confession.

"The locket was given me by the girl who died in the desert — who was that man's wife," she said so that all might hear, her face aflame now under the others' blankly believing glances. "I didn't want to take it at all — but she believed she would not live long, and I felt that it would be unkind to refuse."

Farish M'Kissock looked round, in baleful triumph, at Captain Dove, whose hopes he had thus thwarted and brought to nought. But Captain Dove's evil eyes were fixed on Lord Jura.

"Did she tell you nothing at all of herself — or her history?" the duchess asked very gently.

"Not a word," Sallie answered with transparent honesty.

"But there's another here that knew who she was," said Farish M'Kissock, and pointed to Justin Carthew, who could only nod most unhappily, avoiding Sallie's sudden, incredulous glance.

And, at that, Lord Jura seemed to start from the stupor into which he had gradually lapsed. His haggard face grew dark with insane and uncontrollable passion as he began to realise the fiendish ingenuity of the revenge exacted by the man whom he had, in the first place, wronged so cruelly. No other torture, bodily or mental, could have caused him such anguish as the thought of all his sister must have suffered ere she died. He lifted two twitching hands and sud-

denly leaped, as a tiger might, at Farish M'Kissock's throat.

So swift and unforeseen was the movement that no one could interfere. But he overshot his mark and slipped and fell on the polished oaken floor as Farish M'Kissock stumbled aside, just in time to escape his clutch. He came down with a crash, and his eye-glass dropped and splashed about him in fragments as his forehead struck. But, stunned as he was, he turned on one shoulder and thrust an arm out, and was trying to rise when something seemed to snap in the coat-pocket underneath him, and he uttered a scream of agony as his arm collapsed at the elbow, so that he fell face forward again, struggling like a swimmer with cramp.

"*Keep back!*" shouted Slyne. And Justin Carthew, in the act of stooping to try to help the ex-engineer, sprang to one side in time and no more to escape the touch of a wriggling thing, black and slimy, like a live shoe-string, which had come slithering out from under the hand with which the fallen man was clawing at the floor. It was almost at Carthew's ankles. He leaped convulsively again, and came down on it with both feet. Its little venomous head writhed round and struck more than once at the patent leather of his low shoes, and then fell limply back and lay still. He set his heel on it, to make sure that it would work no more harm, and turned hastily toward Lord Jura again.

Herries was before him, however, and had already lifted the stricken man's head and shoulders a little. Carthew would have helped to raise him to a sitting posture, but all his limbs curled in a dreadful convulsion and straightened rigidly and curled again in a last awful spasm, and so relaxed, lifeless, while his rolling eyeballs also grew fixed and still. He had ceased to breathe.

"He's dead," said Captain Dove, and started, as if alarmed by the sound of his own voice. And for a space no one else spoke, and no one moved at all. The only undertones that broke the silence were the subdued, helpless weeping of the three women, the muted moaning of the wind on the terrace without. Carthew and Herries were still on their knees, one on either side of the dead man, from one of whose pockets protruded a broken, empty cigar-box. The others stood staring down at him as if they could scarcely yet understand what it was that had made such an instant difference in him.

Carthew got stiffly to his feet. "We must get the women away out of this at once," he whispered to Herries, and held out a hand to help the old factor up.

Herries gazed at him, out of lack-lustre eyes into which a slow return of intelligence crept as he too rose.

"Yes, — my lord," he answered in a low voice, that yet was audible to all but the unhearing ears of him who had been the ninth Earl of Jura, whose heritage was now no more than a quiet niche in the lonely graveyard on the most seaward of the Small Isles, and a young girl's ignorant prayers that he might there find rest and peace.

CHAPTER XXIX

PRIDE'S PRICE

CARTHEW whispered some further hasty instructions to Herries, and, "Yes, my lord," the old factor answered again so that all could hear, and all understood that the tenth Earl of Jura and Baron St. Just had thus succeeded the ninth — who lay there dead on the floor before them.

The duchess was gently leading Sallie away. Herries followed them, on his own errands, while Captain Dove and his accomplices remained looking on with sullen, suspicious eyes, straining their ears in a vain attempt to hear what was to be their fate.

Carthew turned to them. "I'll bid you good night now," he said, in a tone not without a new tinge of authority in it, and at which they looked anything but well pleased. "You'll be more comfortable in your own quarters than anywhere else in the meantime." And, with that sufficiently broad hint, he stood waiting for them to go.

Captain Dove had opened his mouth as if to speak, but said nothing. Slyne, very pinched and white about the nostrils, drew Mr. Jobling toward the door, as if he would not trust the shifty lawyer with Carthew, and answered for them all, with a most sarcastic inflection, "Good night, — my lord!" Now that the worst had come to the worst he was his old cool, careless, calculating self again.

Captain Dove paused at the buffet in passing, and went on with both hands full. Both he and Slyne, on their way toward the North Keep with Mr. Jobling shambling along between them, not unlike a condemned criminal, noticed the unusual number of able-bodied men-servants who seemed to have found aimless occupation of some sort about the corridor, and drew their own discomforting conclusions therefrom.

Slyne even hesitated for a moment on the threshold of the cosy living-hall which occupies the base of the North Keep, and then, with a grimace of disdain, followed the other two, closing the heavy door behind him. Almost immediately he heard the key turned quietly in the lock outside — and knew that his suspicions had been only too well founded. Carthew intended to keep him and his associates prisoners there. He bit his lip and pulled at his moustache as he watched Captain Dove drawing the cork of one of the two bottles of champagne that strategist had brought from the banquet-hall.

"We're cornered at last," he said suddenly, as the old man set the bottle down after having imbibed the best half of its contents. "They've locked us in here."

Captain Dove turned to glare disbelievingly at him, and then, darting across to the door, tugged furiously at its wrought-iron handle. He set a foot against the wall and tried again, with no better results. He bounced about, almost frantic, blaspheming as if bereft of all self-control. Mr. Jobling stood wringing his hands helplessly, his flaccid features expressive of abject despair. But Slyne continued to eye the old man with a strained, disconcerting composure.

"We haven't so much time to spare, Dove," said he

bitingly, " that we can afford to waste any more watching you play the fool. I expect that fellow Carthew will have your whole history out of Farish M'Kissock within — "

" If you had only kept *your* damned mouth shut when Brasse was kicking the bucket," cried Captain Dove, very venomously, " Carthew would be keeping *him* company now. The snake would have got him too. And we'd have won out after all."

Slyne ground his teeth. But that was no moment for futile recrimination, and self-interest served to stay the acrid retort on the tip of his tongue.

" ' If this and if that ' doesn't make any difference now," he declared evenly. " I'm not going to argue with you. I want to get out of this before worse comes my way."

" But how — " moaned Mr. Jobling, across whose mental vision also were no doubt flashing pictures of Wandsworth Common and Wormwood Scrubbs.

Slyne silenced him with a glance. " I'd very gladly leave *you* here to your fate, you fat bungler! " said he, with irrepressible bitterness, " if it weren't that you'd turn informer on us. So come on, both of you. We've only one chance left among us. And, but for me, neither of you would have even that." Wherewith, and only pausing to take a long pull at Captain Dove's open bottle, he turned up the staircase, leaving them to follow him or stay where they were, as they chose.

Captain Dove did follow him, curiously, but not forgetting to pocket the other bottle. The shivering lawyer came close at his heels, no less eager to snatch at any possibility of escape.

" Get into a change of clothes," ordered Slyne, as

he opened the door of his own room. "And I wouldn't be slow about it, if I were you — for *I'm* going as soon as I'm ready."

Captain Dove's change did not unduly detain him, since he merely pulled on a pair of serge trousers and a pilot-jacket on top of his other attire. And Mr. Jobling was back in Slyne's room no less promptly. They found it in darkness and Captain Dove uttered a stifled imprecation. But almost immediately, they heard hasty footsteps on the stair without and Slyne reappeared with a coil of thin strong cord in one hand.

"The flagpole-halliards," he explained breathlessly as he shut the door behind him again. "My window looks out on the battlements. We must clamber down. Make the rope secure at this end, Dove, but so that we can pull it after us once we're all down — it's long enough to go double — while I get some things together."

Captain Dove did as he was bidden, so deftly that Slyne had not quite completed his own preparations when the old man called on him to go first.

"Send Jobling down," said Slyne, pulling on an overcoat to cover his evening clothes, and the stout solicitor gave voice to a very heartrending groan as he glared blankly out into the black gulf beyond the window.

"I won't go — " he was beginning when Captain Dove ran furiously at him, clutched him round the waist in a gorilla-like grip, and thrust him, feet foremost, struggling insanely, over the sill.

"Catch hold of the cord — both strands — or I'll drop you!" snarled the old man. "Down you go, now. You'll find a knot every foot or so. You needn't slip unless you force me to start you with a slam on the head." And he

stood watching, grimly amused, while his moaning victim sank out of sight, very gradually.

In a few moments the weight on the rope relaxed.

" Are you there? " he demanded, and had to shout the question again at the top of his voice, so strong was the wind.

" Yes, all right," the answer came back, very faint but palpably freighted with helpless wrath.

" Come on, then, Slyne," ordered Captain Dove, and himself prepared to follow the injured lawyer. " What's that for? " he called in through the window. Slyne was busy securing a bundle about his own shoulders.

" Some spare wraps," Slyne shouted back from between set teeth. " We're going to take Sallie away with us. On you go — I'll be right after you."

Nor had the other two long to wait till he came scrambling down in his turn. And, as soon as they had retrieved their rope, they followed his lead through the darkness.

The three fugitives made their way in the teeth of the wind along the battlements to a point overlooking the terrace that lies at the back of the banquet-hall. And there again their rope stood them in good stead. Slyne thanked his stars that he had studied all the intricacies of the castle so thoroughly, as he led the way, with infinite precaution, from the terrace into the empty passage down which they crept as far as the service-pantry behind the gun-room.

The gun-room was empty also. As he entered it, he gave vent to a long sigh of heartfelt relief.

" We're safe now," he told Captain Dove in a guarded tone, and, pulling off his overcoat, smoothed down his crumpled shirt-front. " But you'd better hurry down to

the water-gate and make sure that the boat there doesn't go off without us. As soon as Sallie comes along, we'll — "

" But what if she won't come? " asked Captain Dove, becoming recalcitrant again. " And how do you know there's a boat below? "

" You don't suppose Brasse swam ashore, do you! " Slyne retorted impatiently. " The boat that brought him from the *Olive Branch* was still there a few minutes ago — while I was at the top of the tower. I suppose he told them to wait for him, in case he struck trouble here. But they may not wait much longer, if you waste any more time.

" And, as to Sallie, leave me to manage. If you trip me up again now with any of your damned nonsense," he finished with sudden fury, " I'll go to gaol quite contentedly — and make sure there that you hang."

" I might still make terms with that fellow Carthew," Captain Dove suggested provokingly and with a great air of cunning.

" All right," returned Slyne. " That's enough." And, crossing toward the fireplace, he pressed the bell-push beside the mantel.

Captain Dove snatched up a candle and, with that, made a dart for the panel in the wainscot. It would not move despite his most desperate efforts. Slyne pulled a bunch of keys from one pocket and promptly released the powerful spring-lock. At a sign from him, Mr. Jobling descended the steps below in Captain Dove's wake. Slyne pulled the panel back into place and was seated quietly writing at the table in one corner when a sleepy-looking footman entered the room.

" I want you to take this note along to her ladyship's

rooms," said Slyne, and yawned. "Give it to her maid. You needn't wait for an answer."

"Very well, sir," the man returned with all the respect due to Slyne's recent standing there and evidently still without suspicion of any change. Slyne yawned again, as if ready for bed, re-reading what he had written. And then, watching his messenger go off with the missive, breathed a thanksgiving that was, at the same time, a prayer to the goddess of chance who was his deity. For he was taking risks now that were recklessly dangerous and might, at any moment, prove deadly to him.

"It would be pretty fatal, for instance, if Carthew chanced to be with the duchess and her when Ambrizette takes my note in," he told himself. "But — there are a dozen other chances of accident, and what's the use of worrying? The wind doesn't always blow from the same quarter. I'd feel safe enough if I only knew where Carthew is at this precise moment."

He crossed to the fireplace, picking up a cigarette by the way, and, having lighted it with trembling fingers, stood staring down into the dull glow of the dying logs on the hearth. He was wondering whether *all* was really lost, and listening most impatiently to every slightest sound. But he had not long to wait before Sallie, pale of face and with a world of woe in her wet eyes, came very quietly into the room.

He held out both his hands to her, but she stopped at a little distance.

"You mustn't blame me, Sallie," he said in a voice meant to carry conviction with it. "I didn't know — I had no idea — I believed honestly from the first that you were — "

"It makes no difference now," she interrupted, "and —

I — I — Oh! I'm *so* ashamed. What can Mr. Carthew think of me! And he *knew* all the time that I had no right to be here!"

"It wasn't your fault either," he assured her soothingly. "You were misled — no less than I was. How could we ever have foreseen — But there's no time to talk of that just now. We must be off. Captain Dove has gone on ahead. He left me to show you the way to the boat."

She lifted a hand dazedly to her forehead.

"I don't know what to do," she murmured. "But — of course, I can't stay here now."

Slyne was watching her tensely. "Most assuredly not," he agreed in haste and trying hard to hide his elation. "You can't possibly stay here — after what has happened. You've far too much proper pride."

"And my promise to you is no longer binding," she said, "since I'm not — It was Lady Josceline Justice with whom you made that bargain — and not with me."

He saw that it was no moment to argue that point. All he wanted at once was to get her safely on board the *Olive Branch*. And he did not contradict her.

"Ambrizette must come with me, Jasper," she said brokenly. "I won't leave her behind."

He set his teeth to stifle an angry refusal of that difficult condition.

"All right, Sallie," he answered smoothly. "I'll risk that too, since you say so. Slip on this coat — it will be bitter cold in the boat. And I'll send for Ambrizette."

CHAPTER XXX

THE TENTH EARL

CARTHEW was feeling anything but fit to cope with all the cares and responsibilities which had devolved upon him again, under circumstances so shocking, no less suddenly than he had been relieved of them all — along with that place in life to which they pertained — by the man now lying dead on the floor before him. As he watched the Duchess of Dawn leading Sallie gently out of the banquet-hall, he would have given a very great deal to have been free to follow them, for Sallie had looked back at him out of tear-dimmed eyes as she went, with an expression he could not quite understand. And, now that she too knew the very worst there was to be told, he was desperately anxious to find out how she was going to deal with him, under such changed conditions.

But there were matters even more urgent to be disposed of, for her sake too, before he could set himself right with her. He pulled himself together, with a great effort.

It was clear that he must not permit Captain Dove and his two confederates to decamp. He had heard enough already to justify him in taking the law into his own hands for the nonce and detaining them there. It was equally clear that he must not delay for a moment in finding out as much more as he might from Farish M'Kissock, who looked as if he could scarcely live for another hour.

He whispered to Herries to take such steps as would ensure that no one whosoever should be allowed to leave the castle, and to shut the three accomplices up together in the North Keep if that could be done quietly, without any scandal. Then, having got rid of Captain Dove and the other two, he was left in the banquet-hall with only the Marquis of Ingoldsby, in a state of apparent coma, old Janet M'Kissock, grief-stricken to the very verge of endurance, and her unfortunate brother, still standing motionless, with bent head and hands clasped, staring down at the dead man — so near in semblance and yet so far beyond reach of his animosity.

The grey-haired housekeeper was pleading with Farish M'Kissock to come away, but he resisted all her attempts to get him to leave that spot.

"Let me bide where I am," he answered her querulously. "In a very little, Janet, I'll be away off after his foolish lordship there, that thinks he has slipped through my feckless fingers again — as he did once before. But I'll soon be on his track again, for they'll have to streek me on the same stretching-board that serves him. Let me bide beside him till then."

Carthew looked anxiously across at the Marquis of Ingoldsby. There was nobody who might better serve as a witness to whatever M'Kissock might still be induced to tell concerning that nightmare past in which the poor corpse on the floor and the girl who had gone away weeping and he himself had all been involved.

"There's somethin' doosid fishy about all these goin's-on," Lord Ingoldsby commented with a good deal more candour than tact, when Carthew made that suggestion to him. "And I'm for Lady Josceline, right through

from start to finish. I don't believe a word of that goat-bearded fellow's yarn. He's been and caught sunstroke somewhere — that's what's the matter with him, eh? He's mad as a hatter.

"But, all the same, I'm willin' to listen to anything more he has to say — and take a mental note of it, so to speak. I want to know who's who and what's what myself."

Carthew turned to Farish M'Kissock then, and the latter looked him over with a frown as of dim remembrance which gradually changed to a scowl of hate.

"And so," said the ex-Emir in a rancorous voice, "*you* have come to your own at last amid it all. Is there no end to your ill race? My men told me that you were safely buried and dead — they showed me the mound that they said covered you. How — "

"Come away from here," said Carthew steadily, "and I'll tell you how I escaped." And Farish M'Kissock, leaning heavily on his sister's shoulder, at last allowed her to lead him to her own room.

Carthew told him then, in few words, while Lord Ingoldsby, listening gloomily, scowled over it, the story of Sallie's daring and his own escape from death, on the African coast.

The ex-Emir's heavy eyes lighted up a little.

"Ay," said Farish M'Kissock, musingly. "And so it was — her — that helped you past your dug grave! I knew her for a mettlesome filly the first time I ever clapped eyes on her. And now — to think that but for you and me she'd be cosily settled, knowing nothing, in this old nest — that should by rights have been my wife's and mine! It's a damned upside-down world this, my fine doctor! But — you'll make it up to her, maybe, in another way?"

He was gazing at Carthew with something of his old imperious, indomitable spirit. "You owe — her — your very coronet, my new Lord Jura," said he.

"I'll pay all I owe," said Carthew, to humour him, "if she'll take any payment from me." And at that the Marquis of Ingoldsby scowled still more blackly.

The ex-Emir made a gruesome effort to laugh sardonically.

"She'll take it," said he, "if you're man enough, if you're man enough to master her," said he and sank back on his couch.

"And now — about Captain Dove," Carthew suggested as he brought paper and ink to the table from the desk in one corner. And the dying man sat up again as if spurred to a final effort.

He looked round at his stricken sister. "Leave us for a little, Janet, woman," said he in a more kindly tone. "There is that to be told now which you would like ill to hear, and his lordship will call you back when I'm through with it."

Carthew nodded hastily to the old housekeeper. "We'll be as quick as we can," he promised: "and you can stay within call."

She went, however unwillingly, and then her brother began the story of all his dealings with Captain Dove, speaking slowly, in a low voice, husbanding his strength, while Carthew wrote down every word of it.

In his eagerness to ensure the downfall of his surviving enemy, he had no hesitation in incriminating himself. Lord Ingoldsby listened as if stricken dumb and Carthew had hard work to contain himself as he heard, among other infamies, of the bargain the ex-Emir had driven with Cap-

tain Dove over Sallie. He would have thrown down his pen during M'Kissock's laboured, self-compassionate account of how Captain Dove had outwitted him, had not the man on the couch at the other side of the table been almost across death's threshold already. M'Kissock's rabid thirst for revenge, his obvious impenitence for all his own crimes and misdeeds, excited repugnance in place of the pity his plight might otherwise have inspired. Carthew was devoutly thankful when that most distasteful task was at length completed, and Farish M'Kissock's feeble, straggling signature attached to the document he had drawn up. Lord Ingoldsby and he both added their names as witnesses, and then he called the housekeeper in again. Her brother, having thus accomplished his final object in life, was evidently sinking fast.

In the corridor outside, Lord Ingoldsby called a halt as Carthew would have turned to leave him with a few hurried words of thanks for the jealous service he had just rendered.

"Half a mo'," interposed his lordship, very morosely. "We might just as well come to an understandin' now as later on. I want to tell you that, whoever Lady Josceline is or is not, I've asked her to marry me — and, if you're goin' to see her now — I don't know what your ideas are, but — we might just as well start fair."

Carthew contemplated him for a moment in surprised silence, and then nodded curtly. He was going to see Sallie at once, if he could, as his rival had divined.

"All right," he assented. "Come on."

He looked into the banquet-hall in passing. Herries was there, with the butler and all his assistants. The dinner-table had been cleared and draped with a great black mort-

cloth. And on it lay, recumbent, with clasped hands, in the clear, mellow light of the tall, white tapers at its head and feet, the unheeding shape of Carthew's predecessor in the earldom of Jura, still dressed in its disreputable, greasy blue uniform and burst boots, with a red smudge, as of iron-rust, on its forehead.

The fires had both been raked out and their hearth-stones strewn with the ashes, not to be rekindled before that night on which the dead earl should be carried away by the water-gate from his catafalque to the great black burial-barge, with the pipes wailing a wild lament for the mountains to echo, and the waves or the still sea-surface, as might befall, crimson under the twinkling torches of those who would follow, with muffled oars.

Herries came forward to speak to Carthew. " I'm seeing to everything here now, my lord, and we'll soon have all as it should be," said he. " Captain Dove and his friends are fast, in the North Keep. And your other orders have all been observed."

" I'll see you again in a little, then," Carthew returned, and went on his way, by no means inspirited.

It was the Duchess of Dawn, her blue eyes still blurred and showing traces of tears, who came to the door of the boudoir in Sallie's suite in the distant West Wing, in response to Carthew's knock.

" Have you not brought her back with you? " she asked, and looked surprisedly past him at Lord Ingoldsby.

" Where is she? " Carthew asked, in sudden alarm. " I haven't seen her."

" She went along to the gun-room a little ago — a note came to say she was wanted there. And — I supposed it would be from you."

" I'll find her there, then," declared Carthew, and turned and retraced his steps very hurriedly. An instant dread of some unforeseen mischance among his over-rapid plans for her welfare had filled his mind; and his face grew dark as he hobbled back along that endless corridor and across the deserted main hall again, with Lord Ingoldsby at his elbow.

Of the sleepy servants they passed by the way he asked no questions, for only the butler and his immediate underlings knew anything as yet of what had happened. It had been Carthew's own idea to prevent any garbled report being spread about till he should have devised some means to save Sallie from pain and scandal.

He found the gun-room empty, and stared about it in dire distress. Then he sniffed the air, frowning. And then he noticed a half-smoked cigarette smouldering in the fireplace. He picked it up hastily and saw Jasper Slyne's monogram upon it.

" Must have been a long time burning," he thought, and a concrete suspicion flashed through his mind. But that seemed so far-fetched at first that he shook his head impatiently over it.

" They could scarcely escape from the North Keep," said he to himself. " But — I may as well make sure that everything's safe here while I'm about it," he muttered, and limped across to the panel that covered the passage to the water-gate.

It was unlocked.

He pulled it open and looked down into the darkness, listening intently. Then he swung round and, snatching up the lighted lamp on the table beside the fire, made off down the steps, leaving Lord Ingoldsby in the dark.

But his gaping lordship was not to be left behind. He followed hot-foot, uttering foolish oaths as he barked an elbow on the rock wall.

Carthew stopped suddenly. He could hear voices not very far ahead and the movement of some heavy weight. The tunnel curved a little there, and he knew he must be near the bridge that crosses the oubliette. He went on again, very cautiously, keeping close to one wall and shading the lamp as well as he could, till he came to a point where further precaution was idle. For, fifty yards away, straight ahead, he could see Slyne holding a candle beside Captain Dove, who was stooping over the roughly carpentered tree-trunk which still stretched from lip to lip of the intervening chasm. Its former neighbour had disappeared.

Captain Dove looked up and caught sight of Carthew in his turn. He had got his hands under the heavy trunk, and staggered sideways, straddling it, till its butt-end was close to the brink. Carthew had all but reached the opposite edge of the pit between them when he let it go with a breathless grunt and it fell almost soundlessly into the void below.

Slyne blew out his candle then, with a bitter, mocking laugh, but not before Carthew had observed Mr. Jobling and Ambrizette in the background, with a drooping figure between them.

CHAPTER XXXI

"AT THE END OF THE PASSAGE"

CAPTAIN DOVE looked across at Carthew with a hoarse chuckle, no less malicious. He was evidently in that mordant, capricious humour most common with him at moments when his potations had merely begun their evil work on his wits.

"Light that candle again, Slyne, confound you!" he ordered sharply. "His noble lordship, our American friend, can scarcely see us — to say good-bye."

"Oh, come on," Slyne urged, obviously almost at the end of his patience. "We've no more than time to get safely away before we'll have the hue and cry after us in the fishermen's boats — and they're faster than you imagine."

"*You* can't teach *me* anything about boats!" Captain Dove retorted with crapulous dignity. "So just light — Or, here — gimme the candle, quick! And don't address any more of — of your in—invidious conversation to me."

"I'll see Sallie safely afloat, then," suggested Slyne. "We'll have to send her down in a whip, I expect. The sea's always rising."

"She's a better seaman than you are, Slyne," the old man returned with a sneer. "And she'll go down hand under hand, same as I will — when I'm quite ready. Till then, she'll stay here with me, so that his loving lordship there can have a last, long look at her." He chuckled again,

most discordantly. "But — you can see that fat stiff, Jobling, safely afloat, if you like. It will probably take a whip to tempt *him* to run the risk of a wetting on his way aboard."

The wretched object of his derision gave vent to a very audible groan, hearing which, Captain Dove laughed aloud, with malevolent relish. And, having at length succeeded in striking a match, he turned again toward Carthew, standing still and silent on the other side of the apparently bottomless chasm which cut the pathway apart.

"Are there only the two of you there?" he asked, darting a contemptuous glance at Lord Ingoldsby.

"That's all," Carthew answered tersely. He was absolutely at his wits' end, but thought he could not do better than detain the old man there as long as he might.

"But you've raised the alarm up above?" Captain Dove suggested, with all the fatuous cunning of one half-fuddled. "And we'll have a pack of your cut-throats in petticoats down on us in a minute or two?"

He looked savagely round at Slyne. "I thought I told you to see that bloated Jonah into the boat!" he blurted explosively. And Slyne, with an exasperated shrug of the shoulders, sauntered away, with Mr. Jobling in very uncertain attendance.

"I want to talk to you on my own account for five seconds or so, young-fellow-my-lad," Captain Dove continued, as if in confidence, to Carthew. "But — is it safe, eh? You haven't answered my questions yet. And — you've turned the key on us once already!"

"You're safe from pursuit in the meantime," Carthew reassured him.

"I'll take your word for it, sir," Captain Dove declared,

and, bowing very graciously, all but over-balanced himself. "And now let me ask you whether you have been listening to any more lies from Farish M'Kissock; because, if you have, we must part brass-rags right away."

Carthew was most sorely tempted to spare the truth, and made haste to answer honestly while he might. "I've heard all he had to tell," said he, "and — "

"And you believe it all!" Captain Dove interposed, with maudlin pathos, his evident intention to see whether he could not even yet make terms of some sort for himself with the young American knocked on the head. "Well, well! We must be jogging now, Sallie."

The girl stepped forward beside him at that, and Carthew was thankful to see Ambrizette clinging to her skirts, for she had told him more than once how often the dumb, black dwarf had stood betwixt her and imminent harm.

Her sweet, sensitive features were very pale, but placid, as if, after the sore stress she had suffered, she had found some sort of peace. And all the pride seemed to have died out of her downcast eyes as she faced him across the dark, impassable gulf that stretched between them.

"I don't want you to think that I have gone away unwillingly, Mr. Carthew," she said, and his heart almost failed him as he heard that. It had never occurred to him that she might have taken such a sheerly suicidal step of her own free will.

"But why — " he cried, and the hurt in his voice perhaps helped to salve a little the sore wounds in her own heart.

"I couldn't possibly have stayed here, you see — after what has happened. And, — I'm not afraid of the future now. You don't understand, perhaps, but — you will remember — I wasn't afraid."

"Come away now, Sallie," said Captain Dove. An irascible voice in the distance was calling upon him insistently.

"Good-bye," she said, submissively, to Carthew, and, looking up, her eyes met his for an instant.

"Wait a minute — only a minute more, for God's sake!" Carthew implored the old man. "It won't do any of you any harm to stand by till I've said my say. It won't help you in the least, Captain Dove, to carry Sallie away — and you'll be far safer, believe me, if you leave her here. I've only been waiting my chance to ask her to marry me, and —"

"I've asked her already," interrupted Lord Ingoldsby, in a tone no doubt meant to be most impressive but strongly resembling a squeal. No one, however, paid him any more attention than if he had been the shadow he seemed.

"And if you carry her off just now," Carthew continued hurriedly, encouraged by the benevolent smile with which Captain Dove was regarding him, "you'll have good cause to regret it. For I'll hunt you down till I find you, and then —"

"Now you're talking," the old man commented approvingly, quite undismayed by that threat. "And then we'll make terms, if you come in time and bring enough money with you.

"I'd even have waited here and fixed it all up, but —" He wagged his shameless white head sorrowfully. "It wouldn't be wise," said he. "You've been prejudiced against me — by Farish M'Kissock. It's too late to think of that now. So I must be off, for my own sake.

"But maybe we'll meet again," he concluded with cheerful complacence, "in some safer spot for me. And, if Sallie's still on my hands when you show up —".

"So be it, then," Carthew agreed, seeing clearly that further appeal would be futile, all eagerness to get above-ground again and begin the chase. He could have the whole fishing-fleet of the village armed and afloat within half an hour, and might even yet succeed in boarding the *Olive Branch* at her anchorage. But, manlike, he had counted without the woman in the case.

"I'm going away of my own free will, Mr. Carthew," said Sallie suddenly, with the same strange expression of face that he had observed when she had looked back at him in the banquet-hall. "And — I don't want you to follow me. You have been far more than generous, but — I couldn't marry you — in any case."

"Don't say that, Sallie," he beseeched, and, "Dove!" cried a very wrathful voice in the distance. "We'll be off without you if you don't come down at once."

The old man's smug, blinking smile instantaneously changed to a furious scowl. He pulled a big, golden-necked bottle from one of his pockets, removed the cork, and, having poured its remaining contents hastily down his throat, tiptoed off down the tunnel with it in one hand, making motions as if to hurl it with accurate aim, leaving Sallie alone there.

Carthew glared across the black gulf at his feet, his free hand clenched, in helpless despair. He would gladly have given his earldom then in exchange for a pair of wings.

"I'll bolt up and get a ladder brought down," groaned Lord Ingoldsby. And he would have made off without more ado but that Carthew had seized him by the sleeve.

"Here! Hold this," commanded Carthew, and thrust the smoking lamp into his hands. Sallie had turned to follow Captain Dove, with dragging steps. He could not

believe that she meant what she had said. He would not let her go without making sure. Farish M'Kissock's contemptuous words had recurred to his mind — "if you're man enough to master her!" Instinct told him that she would not turn back now, and — a man's last stake was all he had left to venture.

"Stop, stop! It's sheer suicide," the marquis cried shrilly, as Carthew ran limping up the tunnel as far as the straight extended, and faced about, throwing off his coat, and balanced there for a breathless instant and then came racing down past him to launch himself bodily into space.

No human being could have leaped the distance, and Carthew had been further handicapped by his lameness. He shot, as if from a catapult, nearly as high as the arched rock-roof, his elbows close, chin on chest, head between his shoulders, knees at his temples and heels tucked back, and, on the downward curve, reached the lower lip of the chasm, landing on one shoulder, to hang there for the space of a couple of heart-beats, as if poised for the inevitable rebound.

Lord Ingoldsby heard the dull thud of his fall and Sallie's stifled, heart-broken cry. He opened his eyes and saw the girl desperately striving to pull a hunched-up, relaxing body back from the brink over which, but for her, it would already have toppled. He thought they must both have slipped over before, at the finish, Sallie succeeded in drawing Carthew into safety, and sat down beside him, swaying from side to side, as if her own back were broken.

But, presently, Carthew looked up and then he scrambled on to his knees with a suppressed grunt of agony. For a time the whole world swam redly about him, but he clenched his teeth, not to be overcome. And when Sallie in turn

got on to her feet again, white and shaking, he had recovered the use of his voice.

"I won't let you go — dear," he said dazedly, and started, in renewed alarm for her, as they heard Captain Dove calling her harshly from below.

"Coming," she called back, since she could not help herself.

"You must stay here, or — he'll kill you!" she whispered in an agony of entreaty. "I'll go now; it will be best so. And if, by and by, you still care to follow — "

"You go on," he said gently. "I'm going to follow you now."

She had no option but to obey him, since to have remained there would merely have meant that Captain Dove, coming back for her, would have him at a greater disadvantage. And as she led the way in the dark, with slow steps, he followed quietly; while Lord Ingoldsby, left to his own devices as they disappeared, was brilliantly inspired to bolt back for help.

A little further on a thick twilight made progress more easily possible, and they could feel the salt breath of the sea on their fevered faces. Then, at last, they drew near the oblong opening in the cliff-face at which Captain Dove had for several minutes been busy abusing the men in the boat below. But he was in no better temper by then, since the empty bottle he had hurled at Slyne had knocked the steersman insensible.

"Is that you, Sallie?" he snapped, looking round.

"Below there, you lubbers! Stand in again. We're coming down now.

"Hurry up, girl!" he barked, impatiently. "It's high time we were away."

He was leaning out over the ledge, clinging with one hand to a bar of the great water-gate, so thick, that his stubby fingers did not meet round it. Carthew, creeping after Sallie set her suddenly aside, and ran at him.

Captain Dove heard him coming, but too late to save himself. He felt as if a bullock had kicked him in the small of the back, and, as his hold broke, he fell headlong, howling like an evil spirit, into the smothering, yeasty surge through which his boat was already hastily backing to pick him up.

Carthew set his back to the heavy gate, and it swung slowly shut. But Slyne had not left behind the key he had for its modern lock, and its old-fashioned draw-bolts were rusted fast. He could only hope that Lord Ingoldsby would bring back some means of bridging the drowning-hole before Captain Dove and his helpers could storm the position again.

He laughed, a little light-headed by then, as he stumbled up the long, dark slope, with Sallie close at his shoulder.

"I told you I wouldn't let you go, — dear," he declared triumphantly, and his laugh changed to a low, choked groan as she would have taken his arm to help him; for he was walking unsteadily.

"Don't touch that one," he begged. "It's a bit sore; I came down on it when I jumped."

"Do you think it's broken?" she whispered, and her eyes grew dim as she thought of all he had suffered through her. She had stopped. There were lights coming down the tunnel, and hurrying feet, on the further side of the drowning-hole.

He slipped his sound arm about her. "There's nothing broken that can't be mended now," he murmured contentedly. "Unless you're really determined to break my heart."

THE END

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